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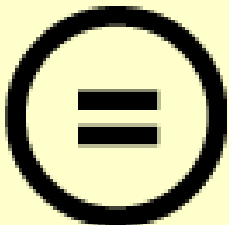
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GENDER, POWER AND IDENTITIES IN THE FITNESS GYM

**TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF
THE 'EXERCISE BODY-BEAUTIFUL COMPLEX'**

By

Louise Mansfield

A Doctoral Thesis

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of**

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
LIST OF FIGURES	iii
INTRODUCTION	
1. Gender, Bodies and the Fitness Gym: The Research Questions	1
2. Sporting Bodies and Social Relations	1
3. Images of the Body, the Fitness Industry and Consumer Culture	2
4. Sporting Bodies and Gender Relations	5
5. Fitness and Femininities: A Feminist Figural Approach	8
6. Towards a Sociology of 'The Exercise Body Beautiful Complex'	9
CHAPTER 1 - Feminisms and Figural Sociology: Differences, Tensions and Overlapping Principles	
1.0 Introduction	14
1.1 Examining Feminist Themes and Issues	15
1.2 Feminisms, Values and the Sociology of Sport	17
1.3 Involvement and Detachment	19
1.4 Gendered Themes and Issues in the work of Norbert Elias	22
1.5 Figural Sociology and the Study of Sport and Gender	24
1.6 Feminist-Figural Sociology: The Study of Sport and Gender Relations	26
1.7 Concluding Remarks	27

CHAPTER 2 - Feminisms, Figurations and the Fitness Gym:

Theoretical Concepts and Issues.

2.0 Introduction	30
2.1 Figurations, Interdependence and Gender Relations	30
2.2 Figurations, Gender and Issues of Power	34
2.3 Power and Interdependence; "The Primal Contest" and "The Game Models"	36
2.4 Gender and Two-Person Games	38
2.5 Gender and Multi-person Games at One Level	41
2.6 Gender and Multi-person Games at Several Levels	43
2.7 Gender and Established-Outsider Relations	45
2.8 Gender, Civilized Bodies and Civilizing Processes	48
2.9 Gender, Civilized Bodies, Identities and Habitus	53
2.10 Concluding Remarks	58

CHAPTER 3 - Bodies, Gender and Sport: A Review of Literature

3.0 Introduction	60
3.1 Bodies and the Sociology of Sport: Corporeal Issues and Concerns	61
3.2 Feminisms and Sporting Bodies	65
3.3 Feminisms, Foucault and Sporting Bodies	69
3.4 Elias, Gender and Civilized Bodies	77
3.5 Gendered Sporting Bodies: Figurational / Process-Sociological Approaches	85
3.6 Gender, Power and Sporting Bodies	93
3.7 Sporting Bodies, Gender, Identities and Habitus	96
3.8 Bodies, Exercise and Consumer Culture	105
3.9 Concluding Remarks	108

CHAPTER 4 - Method and Methodology

4.0 Introduction	111
4.1 The Field of Qualitative Research: Definitions and Developments	111
4.2 Methodological Issues and Concerns in Research	118
4.3 The Challenge of Qualitative Method: 'The Quantitative / Qualitative' Debate	120
4.4 The Research Problem	122
4.5 A Feminist-Figurational Approach: Epistemological / Ontological Concerns	123
4.6 Being Involved in the Fitness Gym: History, Biography and Social Life	125
4.7 Feminist Methodology / Feminist Epistemology: A Critical Review	128
4.8 Feminist-Figurational Research: Some Sensitising Concepts	131
4.9 The Research Strategy: An Ethnography of The Fitness Gym	140
4.10 Access and Phases of Research	143
4.11 Participant Observations	146
4.12 Interviewing in Qualitative Research	151
4.13 Interviewing Female Exercisers at the Fitness Gym	154
4.14 Analysing, Interpreting and Writing an Ethnography of the Fitness Gym	162
4.15 Ethical Considerations	168
4.16 Concluding Remarks	170

CHAPTER 5 - The 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex':

Gender-Power Relations and Established-Outsider Theory

5.0 Introduction	173
5.1 Images of Femininity in the Health and Fitness Club	174

5.2 “I want to be lean no spare fleshfat free” (Beth)	175
5.3 “I want to have muscles but not like bloke proportions” (Dina)	177
5.4 “Exercise for health? fitness? who cares? I just want to look good” (Helen)	180
5.5 Idealised Female Bodies and the Instructor / Client Relationship	185
5.6 Female Body Ideals and Body Knowledge: Ambiguities and Contradictions	189
5.7 Bodies, S(exercise), and Looking Good	195
5.8 The Fitness Club, Femininities and Rule of Corporeality	197
5.9 Everybody Wants to be Somebody: Insider Women and the Body-Beautiful	199
5.10 Established-Outsider Bodies and Group Charisma and Group Disgrace	206
5.11 The Nature and Function of Gossip in the ‘Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex’	210
5.12 Becoming and Being an Insider; Exercise Knowledge and the Body-Beautiful	216
5.13 Concluding Comments	221
 CHAPTER 6 - The ‘Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex’:	
The Production and Re-production of Feminine Identities	
6.0 Introduction	227
6.1 Conceptualising Identity	228
6.2 The Personal Pronoun Model: Fitness, Femininities and Identification	232
6.3 Feminine Identities, Social Habitus and the Fitness Gym	237
6.4 Adolescence, Feminine Habitus and Exercise Identities	245
6.5 Established-Outsider Relations and I/We Images of Femininity	255

6.6 The Fitness Gym, Foresight and Gender Identification	260
6.7 Fitness, Feminine Identities and Psychologization	264
6.8 The Fitness Gym, Female Bodies and Work-Out Rationality	267
6.9 Fitness, Femininities and Corporeal Shame and Embarrassment	271
6.10 Concluding Comments	276

CONCLUSION

1. Introduction	281
2. (Re) addressing the Research Problem	281
3. Female Bodies, Fitness and the 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex'	282
4. A Feminist-Figurational Analysis of Gender / Body / Sport Relations	285
5. Methodological Considerations	288
6. The 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex': A Theoretical-Empirical Case Study	290

BIBLIOGRAPHY	297
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APPENDIX

1. Example of edited interview transcripts	323
2. Summary of interviewee profiles	382
3. Example of observation field notes	385
4. Interviewee profile form	389
5. Ethics agreement	390

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which female bodies are central to the production and reproduction of gendered social inequality, and the formation of feminine identities in the fitness gym. Ethnographic methods were utilised to investigate the patterns and relations of power that underpinned the production and reproduction of feminine body ideals and feminine identities and habituses in a fitness gym in the South-East of England. The potential usefulness of harnessing feminist and figural concepts for understanding gendered bodies in the context of sport and exercise is also explored.

Some of the theoretical and methodological links between feminist and figural perspectives are explored in this thesis. A feminist-figural approach is presented as a useful way of understanding the complexities of female body image and feminine identification in the fitness gym. Central in this regard has been an examination of the unequal relationships between, and within, groups of people in exercise and fitness settings. The task of producing a relatively high degree of adequate knowledge about gendered bodies in the fitness gym has also involved consideration of several concepts related to Elias's (1978, 1987) theory of involvement and detachment including: the personal pronoun model, the use of developmental thinking, the interplay between theory and evidence and the adequacy of evidence. Feminist and figural ideas about gender, power and identities have been of use in making sense of the relationships between working-out, female bodies and femininities. Elias's conceptualisations of power, established-outsider relations and identification have been particularly helpful.

Evidence from participant observations and interviewing revealed that several mechanisms serve to reinforce, challenge and negotiate a variety of images of the female body-beautiful in the fitness gym. These include: the insecurity and emotion that surround the acquisition and maintenance of an ideal physique, the monopolisation of corporeal power, the construction of group charisma and group disgrace, the formation of gossip networks, and the corporeal logic of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. The findings also reveal that female bodies are central to the formation of feminine identities and habituses. Feminine identities are founded on both different and shared characteristics of the female body-beautiful. Some female exercisers also share some characteristics with other women, specifically in the context of the fitness gym. Linked to a desire for a high status body image, there is a tendency for white, western, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied women, who go to the gym, to share a preference for cosmetic fitness activities, and an

emotional tie to aspirations for a slender, muscularly toned physique. The exercise histories of the women in this study indicated that the inculcation of feminine conduct and bodily preference happens over time, and in relation to a range of corporeal experiences including: physical education, sport, exercise, dance, dieting and adolescence.

KEY WORDS: Gender, Bodies, Power, Femininities, Figural (Process) Sociology, Feminisms

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

Figure 1: The 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. 10

INTRODUCTION

1. Gender, Bodies and the Fitness Gym: The Research Questions.

This research project concerns the social dynamics of a fitness gym in the South-East of England. Broadly speaking, the purpose was to consider the manner in which bodies are central to the production and reproduction of gendered social inequality in the gym environment. Of central concern was the way that corporeal power relations impact on the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities. The intention of the project was to make sense of what appears to be a contemporary fascination with fitness gyms, working-out and female body image. In doing so, one of the central aims was to explore the theoretical and methodological relationships between feminisms and the "figurational/process-sociological" approach derived from the work of Norbert Elias (Dunning, 1999, p. 241). Consideration, then, is given to the potential of a feminist-figurational approach as a means of adding to existing knowledge about gendered bodies in the context of sport and exercise.

Popular images of femininity are mediated through bodily representations of slim, tight muscles and the appearance of health, youth and vitality. Such images dominate (western) fashion magazines and health and fitness publications, and are commonly reinforced by personnel in the exercise, fitness, health, sport, and diet industries. This research is concerned with understanding how exercisers who work-out at a fitness gym perceive and react to such ideals. The more specific objective is to explain the apparently female preoccupation with exercise practices aimed at sculpting small, slender and tight physiques.

2. Sporting Bodies and Social Relations

Bodies are central to the exercise regimes that take place in fitness gyms. At the same time as constituting the corporeal core of such physical activity, bodies represent striking social symbols within the fitness gym culture. Emphasising that the

body is, at the same time, physical and social, it is recognised that the (western) tendency to view the body as uniquely biological was, until relatively recently, reflected in academic studies of sport and exercise (Cole, 2002; Loy et al., 1991; Maguire, 1993, 2004). Theoretically, and practically, sporting bodies have been the preserve of sciences that seek to measure organic parameters such as maximum oxygen uptake, or the physical production of bodily forces, or levels of anxiety.

A decade ago, there was also a recurring narrative of neglect of the body in the sociology of sport literature. But now, authors from a sociological perspective more generally, and in terms of the sociology of sport and exercise specifically, have recognised the social and cultural significance of the body. For more than ten years, there has been increasing awareness that sociological explanations of the body are important if we are to further an understanding of the relationships between mind and body, nature and culture, individual and society, and emotion and reason. What is principally at issue here is that bodies are not simply and exclusively a fact of nature. Rather, they are simultaneously biologically and socially significant.

3. Images of the Body, the Fitness Industry and Consumer Culture

As well as the more recent increase in academic interest in the body, there seems to be a popular obsession with body image, and physical health and fitness. I do not wish to imply that corporeal concerns about appearance and health are a unique feature of contemporary societies. Body cultures vary over time, and within and between societies (Maguire, 1999, 2004; Cole, 2002; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). Yet, one only has to make a cursory review of today's newspaper reports, magazine articles, television documentaries, radio talk shows, and Internet sites to realise the current importance of bodily appearance and physical function.

The emphasis on body maintenance in contemporary (western) societies is reflected in the significance of the healthy body. Current anxieties surrounding the UK's biggest killers, coronary heart disease, obesity, and some forms of cancer, for

example, are part of a wider social, economic and political climate focused on educating and encouraging individuals away from bodily neglect. The recurring theme in government health strategies is that sport, exercise and physical activity are critical components of a healthy lifestyle and a healthy body. This message is constantly reinforced through the media ("A bad diet," 2004; Campbell, 2003a, 2003b; Gilling, 1995). Dominant media rhetoric about corporeal appearance reflects a concern that 'fattie' images of excess symbolise early 21st century life. The recurring warning is that being fat is unattractive, unnatural, and unhealthy, and can lead to heart disease, forms of cancer, fertility and sexual problems, diabetes, and early death. Individuals are increasingly held responsible and accountable for the condition of their bodies. And, it is through lifestyle changes that we are encouraged to take control of our health and appearance. Reinforcing the message from various political agents, and the scientific community, book writers, newspaper columnists, and television and radio presenters tell us how to stay in shape (Campbell & Revell, 2003; Coomber, 2004; Rowe, 1998). The message is clear. Eat less fat, drink less alcohol, consume more fruit and vegetables, and run, skip, cycle, jog and swim, and you are on your way to improved health and well-being.

For some authors this self-preservationist, individualised approach to constructing the healthy body characterises the global consumer culture that has been developing more rapidly since the early part of the 20th century (Cole, 2002; Featherstone, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1996; Maguire, 2004). Shilling (1993) and Featherstone (1991), for example, explain that images of health, youth, vitality, and beauty are those associated with developments in several institutions associated with the industrialised world. The growth of media and advertising companies, medical professions, sport and exercise sciences, the fitness and health industries, and diet technologies have been influential in constructing contemporary images of health and beauty. For Maguire (2004) one consequence of the global development

of sport, and sports science, has been the emergence and diffusion of a body culture defined by achievement sport. Medicalization, scientization and rationalization of human bodies are manifest in elite sports performances, as well as in the discourse surrounding fitness and health programmes (Maguire, 1999, 2004).

Healthy bodies are also closely associated with youth, beauty and sex appeal. There is a distinct value placed on the healthy body. Images of health and fitness are conflated with ideals of success, discipline, (sexual) pleasure, and longevity. For many, such ideals are the hallmarks of high status individuals. We are constantly reminded that the key to longevity, and a youthful exuberance, is to be slim, muscularly toned, and fit, with a healthy glow to our skin texture and colour. The closer one can be to such body ideals, the greater one's status and value. Managing the body for the twin purposes of health and appearance demonstrates that our corporeal desires are simultaneously biological and social. So, at the same time as being concerned with inner health, growing numbers of people are preoccupied with their external look (Featherstone, 1991; Lupton, 1996, 1997; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1996).

For over three million people in Great Britain, the fitness gym is the place for 'fighting flab', getting 'fit', staying 'in shape', and improving health (MINTEL, 2003). There has been an explosion of fitness gyms and health clubs since the 1980s. Buckingham and Finch (1998), for example, have noted that one in three adults would like to become a member of a fitness gym, one in ten working adults have taken up membership of a gym, and there are approximately 2,200 commercial fitness facilities in Great Britain. Indeed, there is profit to be made from the body-beautiful. The fitness club industry is worth over £1bn a year (Marks, 1998). According to the market research group MINTEL (2003), one in five adults in the UK uses a health and fitness gym, but one in three adults are of the opinion that it is important to exercise to keep the body 'in shape' and healthy. Furthermore, one third

of all adults in the UK wish to belong to a health and fitness club. The conclusion of the MINTEL (2003) report on health and fitness clubs indicated that the health and fitness gym was increasingly significant, to people in the UK, as a place for improving the appearance and health of the body. Both women and men exercise in order to control their appearance and health. Yet, some of the exercise regimes offered at fitness gyms, tend to be separated along gender lines (Buckingham & Finch, 1998; Shilling, 1993). The culture of the fitness gym seems to reflect a common sense belief that, for women, the achievement of a slender, lean, muscularly toned, and tight body will bring with it a lifetime of health and happiness (Akbar, 2004).

4. Sporting Bodies and Gender Relations

Increasingly, academic literature has explored the relationships between bodies, gender, and sport and exercise practices. In terms of this research project, the rationale for studying gender, in the exercise and fitness context, is based on the widely examined idea that the body constitutes a site of struggle over gender power relations and gendered identities (Birrell, 1998, 2002; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1987; Hargreaves, 1994; Shilling, 1993; Cole, 1993, 2002; Theberge, 1985, 2002). A corpus of literature concerning gender and sporting bodies has emerged over the past two decades. Such scholarship is informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives (Andrews, 1993; Cole, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2002; Connell, 1995; Dunning, 1986; Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Featherstone, 1991; Gruneau, 1993; Hargreaves, 1987; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Laberge & Sankoff, 1988; Maguire, 1993, 1999; Markula, 1995, 2000; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Shilling, 1991, 1993; Theberge, 1991, 2002).

An increasingly dominant theme in sociological debates about understanding, challenging, and changing gender inequality in sport and exercise is linked to contestations over the meanings, uses and control of female and male bodies.

Historically, sport has been synonymous with men, maleness and masculinity (Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Maguire, 1986, 1999, 2004; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Theberge, 1985, 2002). Traditionally, sporting contests have provided a site for the production and reproduction of masculine physicality, behaviour and identities. In addition, it has been argued that the culture of sport has contributed to male empowerment and the de-integration of females (Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Dunning, 1999; Maguire, 2004; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Dunning, 1999). However, linked with the changing position of women in society, and debates about females and physical activity, girls and women have become increasingly involved in a variety of sports and exercise activities (Hargreaves, 1994). More recent literature concerning gender, bodies and sport has begun to explore sport and exercise as sites of cultural resistance to, and negotiation of, traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity (Birrell, 1988, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Theberge, 1995, 2002; Dunning, 1999).

Feminist theoretical perspectives, and the political impact of second-wave feminist thought, have made an important contribution to understanding the significance of bodies in the production and reproduction of gendered social inequality (Turner, 1996; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). Since the 1970s, feminist accounts of sport and gender have increasingly harnessed critical theoretical perspectives that have brought the complexities of gender/body/sport relations to the fore (Birrell, 1988, 2002). Emphasising the struggle between dominant and subordinate groups, the critical feminist agenda concerns four broad themes: the construction of masculine ideology and the production of male power through sport; the reproduction of dominant female ideals through media practices; the body as a site for defining gender relations; and, resistant practices of women (and men) seeking to challenge established sporting structures and ideals.

To some extent, researchers examining the themes outlined above recognise that gendered processes in sport and exercise are relational in nature. But, the work of figurational sociologists can bring the relational, and processual, characteristics of gender into sharper focus. Elias (1983, 1986, 2000) presents several insights into the problematic of gender inequality that can help in understanding the nature and consequences of various power ratios between, and within, groups of women and men. Increasingly, figurational sociologists have begun to examine the production and reproduction of masculine, *and* feminine, identities, habituses, and behaviours in sport and sports-related contexts (Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Dunning, 1999; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Mansfield & Maguire, 1999; Waddington et al., 1998).

The themes of the critical feminist agenda dovetail with a figurational analysis of gender and gender relations. Emphasising that relations between, and within, groups of women and men are affected by: the character and overall structure of particular societies; both “bio-psychological” and “socio-cultural” factors, and fundamental balances of power, the figurational agenda involves several themes that reflect critical feminist work on sport and gender (Dunning, 1999, p. 226). Elias’s theories are of use in understanding: the production and inculcation of masculine and feminine behaviours, identities and habituses; the relative empowerment of females in sport; the significance / meaning of sport and exercise for females; changing ideological perspectives in sport, and the wider society, regarding what counts in terms of feminine identities, habituses and behaviours; and, resistance by men and women to increasing and widening female participation in sport and exercise.

One way of furthering our knowledge about the dynamics of gender, the body and physical activity might be to consider women and men, femininities and masculinities in relational terms (Dunning 1999; Hall, 1996; Murphy et al., 2002). This may be achieved by thinking in conjunction with feminist concepts, and the

figurational/process-sociological paradigm developed by Elias. It is argued here, that, in the context of the fitness gym, such an approach presents a way of coming to terms with the complexities of gender/power/body relations, as well as advancing an understanding of the production and reproduction of feminine identities, habituses and behaviours. Let me spell out why this is the case.

5. Fitness and Femininities: A Feminist Figural Approach

The work of figurational sociologists has been criticised by some authors for being gender blind, underpinned by masculinist assumptions, and, therefore, inadequate in terms of advancing our knowledge of gender relations (Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Horne & Jary, 1987). Unresolved differences between the perspectives are also evident in the argument that some sports feminists fail to theorise adequately about gender relations because their ideological commitments cloud a more detached, knowledge-based account (Dunning, 1992).

It is emphasised in this research that both feminist and figurational sociologists have made significant contributions to understanding gender in the context of sport and physical activity. Furthermore, using Elias's ideas, and particularly his theory of involvement and detachment, there is potential to resolve some of the differences between the perspectives. Feminists could harness their 'involvement' as a source of motivation and insider knowledge, while, at the same time, seeking to maximise a 'detached' position so that relatively undistorted accounts of sport, exercise and gender relations are presented. Increasingly, figurational sociologists are recognising that Elias's work has not, as yet, been fully utilised in terms of understanding gender, and in particular in relation to advancing knowledge about females and femininities in the context of sport (Dunning & Maguire 1996; Dunning, 1999; Murphy et al., 2002). Following feminist approaches to reflexivity in the research process, figurational sociologists could continue to examine the impact of any masculinist and feminist

assumptions so that more adequate knowledge about sport and gender relations might be developed.

There are some tensions between sports feminists and figurational sociologists. However, there is no clear-cut division between the perspectives. Rather, it is argued here that there is potential for theoretical and methodological synthesis that would advance our understanding of sporting bodies and gender relations. Such a view reflects the claim that one *can* be a feminist and a figurational sociologist at the same time. Feminists and figurational sociologists share a concern with examining the dynamic and relational nature of gendered processes in time and space (Birrell, 1988, 2002; Dunning, 1992, 1999). To a large extent, they seem to ask the same questions about gender, sport and exercise. Broadly speaking, these questions concern the struggles between, and within, groups of women and men that characterise the production and reproduction of feminine and masculine behaviours and identities in sport and exercise contexts.

It is the intention of this research to advance the argument for feminist figurational perspectives on gender, sport and society. In addition, there is scope for the findings of the research to contribute to existing literature on gender, exercise and the female body-beautiful. Guiding the research strategy was an underlying intention to examine the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'.

6. Towards a Sociology of 'The Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex'.

The 'exercise body-beautiful complex', represented in Figure 1, is a network of interdependent groups whose actions are mutually reinforcing of images of the female body-beautiful in exercise and fitness settings. Figure 1 sets out, in diagrammatic form, the major figurations involved in the production and reproduction of feminine identities and behaviours in the context of the health and fitness gym. It also sketches out the figurational dynamics involved in understanding the ways in

which bodies are central to the production and reproduction of gendered social inequality in the gym environment.

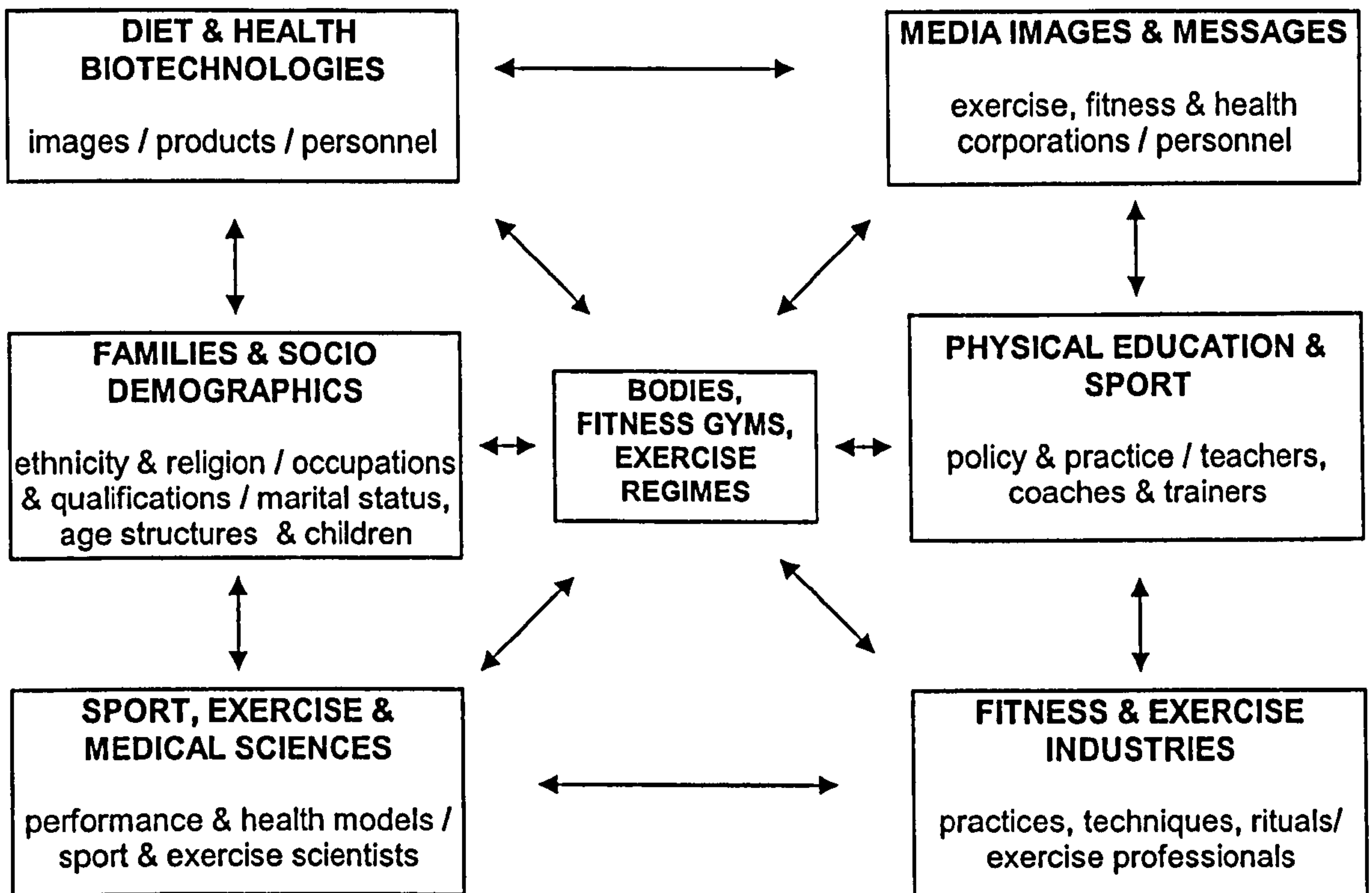


Figure 1: The 'exercise body-beautiful complex'.

This complex identifies that a range of people in sport, exercise and fitness, diet and health, media, family and education institutions influence popular images of femininity. The major focus of participant observation and 'depth' interviewing in this research project, then, was to investigate how people involved in exercise regimes perceive and react to images of the female body-beautiful presented by exponents of different groups in the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'.

Chapters 1 and 2, provide the theoretical foundation for the discussions in this thesis. In Chapter 1, the relationships between feminist and figurational sociology are explored. Some of the tensions between feminist and figurational sociologists are examined. It is emphasised that there are overlapping features

between the perspectives that provide some potential in advancing an understanding of gender, sport and exercise. Chapter 2 develops the argument for feminist figural approaches to investigating gender/body/sport relations. It does so by identifying and discussing how selected feminist and figural concepts have guided this research on gender, bodies and the fitness gym. Recognising that both feminist and figural sociologists are concerned with the centrality of power in relationships, it is emphasised that Elias's conceptualisation of power may help to advance knowledge about the gender relationships in sport and exercise contexts. Elias's theory of established-outsider relations is advocated as a way of understanding the production and reproduction of female I/We images in unequal and shifting gender power relations between and within dominant and non-dominant groups in the fitness gym. Chapter 2 also introduces Elias's ideas about civilizing processes as a basis for understanding the relationships between exercise regimes, gender and civilized bodies.

Having outlined the theoretical framework of this research project in Chapters 1 and 2, Chapter 3 presents a review of the extant literature concerning bodies, gender, sport and exercise. Identifying a narrative of long-term neglect of the body in such literature, attention is given to a range of perspectives that have, more recently, concentrated on the body in understanding aspects of gender and sport. The influence of feminist theories in bringing the body to the fore in the sociology of sport is considered. The contribution of figural insights is highlighted for understanding body cultures, and body habituses. In terms of the wealth of literature pertinent to this investigation, the review specifically considers work in the sociology of sport concerning: bodies and power relations; the corporeal production and reproduction of feminine identities and habituses; and, the relationships between sporting bodies, gender and consumer culture.

Chapter 4 builds on the theoretical framework set out in Chapters 1 and 2, by examining the methodological underpinnings of the research. Selected epistemological and ontological concerns are addressed. The research strategy is outlined and explained, and the methods used during the empirical investigation are detailed. This research project involved an ethnographic approach centring on participant observation and 'in-depth', 'unstructured', interviewing. Several methodological issues arising from the research process are discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapters 5 and 6 reflect upon and exemplify issues about gender power relations, and the formation of gendered identities, that have emerged from the observations and interviews in the fitness gym. Chapter 5 examines the ambiguities and contradictions evident in female body images at the fitness gym. Elias's conceptualisation of power is utilised in mapping out the relative capacities of exercisers to control corporeal ideals of femininity. Furthermore, established-outsider theory is used to shed light on the power dynamics of the fitness gym that serve to differentiate between some higher status and lower status women.

Chapter 6 discusses the fitness gym as a site for the production and reproduction of feminine identities and habituses. Consideration is given to the concept of identity and Elias's ideas about identification and social habitus are explored as a means of understanding the formation of I / We images in the fitness gym. The chapter examines the connection between the construction of We images of femininity, and personal self-images of femininity, in the unequal and shifting power balances between, and within, groups of women and men in the gym environment. The thesis concludes by re-addressing the research problem that is concerned with exploring the manner in which bodies are central to the construction and reconstruction of gendered social inequality, and the production of gendered identities in the fitness gym. The conclusion re-states the potential of a feminist-

figurational analysis for understanding gender / body / sport relations, and outlines the theoretical-empirical findings of the research.

Having introduced the research in terms of the problem, the context, and the theoretical framework, the opening chapter explores, in more detail, the theoretical underpinnings of a feminist-figurational approach to the study of sport / gender / body relations. It does so by discussing the differences and potential interplay between feminisms and figurational sociology.

CHAPTER 1

Feminisms and Figurational Sociology: Differences, Tensions and Overlapping Principles

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the relationship between feminisms and figurational sociology. Both perspectives have made contributions to understanding gender and sport. Yet, some criticise figurational sociologists for being gender blind, and claim that Elias's approach is limited in its application to gender studies (Hargreaves, 1992; 1994; Horne and Jary, 1987). More recent attempts to explore a possible synthesis between feminisms and figurational sociology have been fruitful (Colwell, 1999, Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Mansfield & Maguire, 1999). Still, there are some relatively unresolved differences between the perspectives. Examining some of the tensions, and potential interplay between feminisms and the figurational approach, it is emphasised that there are some overlapping features of the two perspectives that are of use in understanding gender, sport and exercise.

The chapter begins with an examination of the feminist concepts that have informed the analysis. An exploration of the debate between figurational and feminist sociologists about value-orientations in social research is presented. In terms of examining the values of social researchers, a discussion of both Hargreaves's (1992, 1994) criticisms of figurational sociology and Dunning's (1992, 1999) counter arguments is undertaken. Colwell's (1999) evaluation of feminisms and figurational sociology is also considered. Elias's (1987) theory of involvement and detachment is explained as a way of resolving the tensions between the two perspectives. The discussion then explores the relative merits of some of Elias's observations in understanding relations between the sexes. In addition, the contribution that figurational sociologists are making in terms of developing knowledge about gender relations in sport is assessed.

1.1 Examining Feminist Themes and Issues

Several authors suggest that there is no definitive theory of feminism (Beasley, 1999; Birrell, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Kemp & Squires, 1997; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Different feminist perspectives have emerged in connection with changing social, political and economic relations in society at large, and these are represented in a variety of feminist approaches to sport. Feminisms encompass a complexity of perspectives, positions and strategies that are temporally and culturally orientated. Feminisms are marked by continually developing theoretical perspectives and political positions. Yet, distinguishing between varieties of feminist theory does not capture the complexity of the issues, or the "mix of voices", that are manifest in feminist thinking (Birrell, 2002, p. 61).

Perhaps the most useful way to conceive of feminisms is to think of feminist thought as consisting of a number of different strands, some of which overlap. Whatever strand is privileged by a particular scholar, the fundamental purpose of feminist theorising in general, and within the sociology of sport specifically, is to challenge and develop existing knowledge about gender relations. Different feminists give primacy to particular issues, but the hallmark of sports feminism is "a commitment to an explicitly theoretical approach to the interpretation of sport as a gendered activity" (Birrell, 2002, p. 61). Finally, feminists are not just concerned about understanding gender relations. Feminist theory is a political practice committed to changing unequal gender relations.

Feminist theorists have made important advances in understanding gender relations in sport and the political consequences of gender issues. Initially, sports feminism was characterised by critical explorations of, and challenges to, traditional notions of women as inferior and subordinate to men. Such an approach represented a departure from the established sociological focus on men's sports experiences. Early feminist sports scholarship placed the experiences of women as central to an understanding of gender relations. This approach led to important advances in

knowledge about females in sport. For example, sports feminists have developed our knowledge about the gendering of sport in historical contexts (see Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Scraton, 1992; McCrone, 1988; Vertinsky, 1994) and developed our understanding of physicality, sexuality and the body (see Birrell & Cole, 1994; Griffen, 1992, 2000; Clarke, 2000; Lenskyj, 1986, 1991; Caudwell, 1999). There have also been recent developments in feminist theorising that reflect a more explicit recognition of the value of feminisms in understanding men, masculinities and masculinist ideologies. For example, feminist insights have led to the development of critical explorations of male power and masculine identities in sport (Connell, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2002; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Yet, privileging the experiences of women, or men, does not necessarily produce more adequate knowledge about sport and gender relations.

A way of furthering knowledge about the dynamics of sport and gender might be to consider women and men, and femininities and masculinities, in relational terms (Dunning, 1999; Hall, 1996; Murphy et al., 2002). Some feminist cultural studies scholars have brought the complexities of gender relations to the fore, articulating, for example, the relationships between sex/gender, race/ethnicity and social class (see Birrell & Cole, 1994; Gissendanner, 1994; Maynard, 2002; Wray, 2002; Messner, 1992; Hargreaves, 2000). In terms of recognising the importance of examining gender relations in sport, Birrell's (1988, 2002) work is insightful. She presents four core themes of the critical feminist cultural studies project that might help develop an understanding of gender relations in sport. The first theme concerns the construction of masculine ideology and the production of male power through sport. The second issue relates to the reproduction of dominant female ideals through media practices. Questions about the body as a site for defining gender relations represent the third theme. And the fourth concern is with the resistant practices of women seeking to challenge established sporting structures and ideals. To a degree, researchers taking up these themes recognise the relational nature of gendered processes in sport (see Hargreaves, 1994,

2000; Birrell & Cole, 1994; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002; Hall, 1996). In terms of developing our knowledge and understanding of sports and gender such feminist theorists have made a significant contribution. In general, feminists have been right to point out the relative neglect of gender and the unexamined masculinist assumptions within the sociology of sport. Nevertheless, there are some problems surrounding feminist theorising about sport and gender relations. Such issues centre on the relationship between human knowledge and values and are discussed in the next section.

1.2 Feminisms, Values and the Sociology of Sport

Feminists often claim to be self-critical, constantly seeking to address the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of feminisms (Birrell, 2002, p. 62). Yet, in terms of an approach to the advancement of knowledge, feminist theory remains somewhat problematic. For example, Dunning (1992, p. 255) questions whether the “simple replacement of an unexamined masculinist problematic” by “an equally unexamined feminist one” can advance the social fund of knowledge about gender and sport or whether such knowledge is a route to desirable political action. What is principally at issue is the value-orientation of social researchers. In other words, the debate is about the status and generation of knowledge that suffuses the sociological endeavour. There are tensions between some feminist and some figural scholars in this regard. The debate between figurationists and feminists is explicitly argued in the work of Hargreaves (1992, 1994) and Dunning (1992, 1999). Colwell (1999) also illustrates the differences between the perspectives.

One of the main criticisms of some feminist theorising, and one that directly relates to the value-orientation of sociologists, concerns the presentation of more ideologically-based analyses at the expense of more knowledge-based accounts in feminist work (Dunning, 1992; Colwell, 1999). Colwell (1999) sees the problem resulting from a fundamental difference between feminist and figural perspectives. For her, figurationists hold the view that *evaluation* of social phenomena is not necessary in order

to understand them, whereas, a “critical evaluative approach” must be central to feminist theorising because “non-critical approaches de-politicize sports feminism, and thus implicitly support the status quo” (Colwell, 1999, p. 219). At first sight, this might represent a “key” difference between the two perspectives. On closer examination, however, Colwell’s (1999, p. 220) claim that there is a “potentially incontrovertible” difference between feminisms and figural sociology, negating the possibility of a synthesis between them, can be refuted. Indeed, the discussion that follows represents a commitment to the idea that one *can* be a feminist, and a figural sociologist, at the same time. Let me explore this possibility further.

Colwell’s (1999) assertion that being a *feminist* necessitates critical evaluations of social relations, but being a *figurationist* requires the avoidance of evaluative research, fixes a clear-cut and artificial division between the perspectives. Although Colwell examines the methodology of detachment as a way of developing more adequate sociological explanations, and emphasises that figurationists seek to think in fluid, and processual terms, rather than static and oppositional ways, she presents a mutually exclusive choice between feminisms and figural sociology. On the basis of a critical evaluation of the work of selected sports feminists, rather than on any empirically informed research of her own, she maintains that “to be a ‘feminist-figurationist’ seems untenable”. Her position is based on the claim that “evaluation is such a central, indeed integral, feature of feminist accounts, and that it is equally strongly rejected in figural accounts” (Colwell, 1999, p. 236). Yet, a total rejection of ‘evaluation’ in social research seems to me to run counter to the basic assumptions of figural sociology. To claim Elias’s approach as ‘non-evaluating’ implies an ability to be neutral which is implausible. Colwell (1999) largely presents a cogent explanation of the role of values in sociology. On the basis of her discussion about knowledge and values in social research, she offers a critical insight into the adequacy of selected feminist scholarship in the sociology of sport. Nevertheless, to say, as Colwell (1999)

does, that figurational sociology is 'non-evaluating' is to say it is 'value-free' and is a misuse of terms. For Elias (1987), all human activities embody sets of values and are characterised by a balance between emotional involvement and detachment. Problems of involvement and detachment form the basis of Elias's re-conceptualisation of the traditional debate about the role of values in sociology. His position on this issue is discussed below.

1.3 Involvement and Detachment

Traditionally, discussions of the relationship between knowledge and values has centered on the abstract dichotomy between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity'. Proponents from each side of the polarity argue either, that sociologists should be 'value-free' (objective), or that it is inevitable that social researchers will be 'value-laden' (subjective). In terms of the ensuing debate in the sociology of sport, critics such as Hargreaves's (1992, 1994) hold the view that figurationists demand objectivity in social research. For her, figurationists claim to be able to separate themselves from their social ideologies. Figurationists do not claim this to be the case. Hargreaves (1992, 1994) goes on to explain that figurationist statements of neutrality, in fact, reflect and support personal and group judgements. Such comment reflects a misunderstanding of Elias's position on the issue of the relationship between knowledge and values (Dunning, 1992, 1999; Maguire & Young, 2002; Murphy et al., 2002). Elias's approach to the problem of knowledge was to think in terms of relative degrees of involvement and detachment rather than in dichotomized terms of subjectivity and objectivity. It must be stressed that Elias's view was not a matter of dichotomies, but of a "continuum" along which there are balances and blends of involvement and detachment (Mennell, 1992, p.160). Furthermore, he emphasised that all human behaviour is characterised by shifting balances of involvement and detachment, varying within and between groups, and individuals, in differing social situations (Elias, 1978, 1987, 1998a).

One of the central hypotheses of the theory of involvement and detachment is that “the capacity for detachment is a human universal” (Elias, 1987, p. xxxvi). Detachment then is not the sole preserve of social researchers, but “part of the condition of being human” (Dunning, 1992, p. 246). Implicit in this explanation is the idea of the impossibility of *complete* detachment. Detachment is always, inextricably blended with involvement. A more accurate account of the figurational position on this issue would be to note that it was Elias’s contention that evaluation of the social world “is not a simple ‘either-or’ matter but a question of degrees” (Dunning, 1992, p. 246). Once again, this point challenges Colwell’s (1999) suggestion that feminists embrace an evaluative approach and the figurational perspective rejects evaluation. To re-emphasise, evaluation is matter of degree. On this issue, Elias (1978) stresses that the value-orientation of social researchers and the societies they form *should* be examined if social researchers are to develop larger funds of relatively adequate or, in other words, ‘reality congruent’ knowledge (Elias, 1978; Dunning, 1999; Maguire & Young, 2002). Given this, Colwell (1999) is quite right to explore the role of values in sociological research. But, in encouraging sociologists to examine their value-commitments, Elias is not claiming a need, or capacity for ‘non-evaluation’. Let me try to explain further.

For Elias, (1978, p. 153), sociologists should not be “required” or “expected” to express an opinion about how society “*ought*” to be. He asserts that sociologists should strive to free themselves from the idea that there might be any “necessary correspondence” between the social context under investigation, and their own “social beliefs, their wishes and hopes, their moral predilections or their conceptions of what is just and humane” (Elias, 1978, p. 153). Once again, this figurational position does not mean that Elias, or any figurational sociologist, is claiming to be able to escape their social ideologies, or become ‘detached’ in any absolute sense (Dunning, 1992; Maguire & Young, 2002; Murphy et al., 2000). Such a proposition opposes the basic tenets of the figurational approach. Nor does it support Colwell’s (1999) suggestion that figurational

explanations of social processes reject a critical evaluative approach to research, and that feminisms and figural sociology are mutually exclusive, or completely detached from one another.

There are relative degrees of theoretical and methodological detachment and involvement between feminisms and figural sociology. Both feminists and figurationists seek to develop knowledge in ways that will help improve the efficacy of political action by “developing more adequate knowledge-based rather than ideologically-based findings” (Dunning, 1992, p. 255). Dunning (1992, 1999) holds the view that some feminists, including Hargreaves (1994) have added greatly to our understanding of women in sport. As noted previously, some feminists have explicitly recognised the need for relational analyses of gender in sport (Birrell, 1988, 2002; Hargreaves, 1990, 1992, 1994, 2000; Knoppers, 1992). Hall (1996, p. 11), for example supports the argument that gender, class, race and ethnic relations can be more adequately understood by investigating sporting practices as “historically produced”, “socially constructed” and reflective of unequal relationships between dominant and non-dominant groups. Such an historical and comparative view reflects a degree of common ground between the work of some feminists and figural sociologists. What marks out more reality-congruent feminist research is the employment of “a well tempered balance between involvement and detachment” (Dunning, 1992, p. 257). When such a balance is missing, Dunning (1986, p. 79) asserts that sports feminists do not adequately theorise about gender relations because their ideological commitments somewhat cloud the problematic of the relations between the sexes.

So far, this chapter has discussed some of the tensions between feminisms and a figural approach. Elias's ideas about involvement and detachment have been considered as a way of resolving some of the problems outlined. The merits of such ideas are explored further in Chapter 4 in terms of the methodological concerns of this research project. Here, the contribution that feminist and figural theorising can

make to advancing knowledge about gender in sociology of sport has been introduced. The next section identifies the ways in which some of Elias's work explicitly addresses issues of gender relations. In doing so, it presents a challenge to critics who have claimed the figurational / process-sociological approach to be gender blind, and of limited potential in advancing knowledge about gender relations in sport. A more detailed review of such literature is provided in chapter 3.

1.4 Gendered Themes and Issues in the work of Norbert Elias

One aspect of Hargreaves's (1992) feminist critique of the figurational approach is based on the claim that figurationists are silent on gender issues. This is an issue that figurationists themselves have, more recently, commented upon (Dunning, 1992; Murphy et al., 2000; Van Krieken, 1998). Too few figurational accounts have *explicitly* considered the diversity of female sports experiences, the complexities of femininity, or relations between the sexes. Elias (2000, p. 417) himself notes that a detailed analysis of the relations between men and women was beyond the scope of his writing at the time. Nevertheless there are several examples that call into question Hargreaves's (1992) proposition that figurational sociology is limited in answering questions about gender in sport. It is not that Elias's approach *cannot* and *has not* been used in seeking to understand questions of gender. As I have attempted to show in the previous section, the theory and practice of 'involvement and detachment' can be fruitfully used in developing a more adequate understanding of sport and gender relations through a relatively detached approach. This section seeks to demonstrate that some authors using an Eliasian perspective have been concerned with the behaviour of females and males and the relationships between the sexes. It identifies several themes and issues in the figurational / process-sociological approach that are connected to the problematic of gender relations. The section supports the idea that figurationists, like feminists, can and do make significant contributions to understanding sport and gender relations.

It should be noted from the outset that Elias was interested in relations between the sexes before the topic became dominant in sociology (Mennell, 1992). It is documented that he did write a book length manuscript concerning the balance of power between the sexes that was accidentally destroyed in 1971 (Dunning, 1986; Hargreaves, 1992; Mennell, 1992; Murphy et al., 2002). A reconstruction of part of the work was published in 1986. It explored the changing balance of power between the sexes in the particular context of the Ancient Roman State (Elias, 1986). Elias's insights into the problematic of gender inequality, in this 1986 article particularly, can help to sharpen an understanding of the various and shifting power ratios between women and men. Figural sociologists may not have been as explicit as they could be about issues of femininity. Nevertheless, the idea of an unequal and slowly changing balance of power between the sexes is one of the core ideas of figural sociology and informs, for example, The Civilizing Process. Furthermore, a central theme of Elias's ideas about gender, here, is that the relations between and within groups of females and males are fundamentally influenced by the character and organisation of the society in which they live (Elias, 1986; Dunning, 1999, p. 226)

Elias's concern with the balance of power between the sexes is evident in his work with John Scotson on established-outsider relations (Elias & Scotson, 1994). Elias and Scotson (1994) present the findings of a study of a local community, illustrating the network of power relations between established and outsider groups. The study illuminates the mechanisms and dynamics of racial, ethnic, class and gender relations between and within neighbourhoods. A more detailed explanation of Elias and Scotson's (1994) theory and its relevance to understanding gender relations in this study is given in chapters 2, 3 and 5. Here, it is noted that this work brings to the fore the changing, processual nature of sex/gender relations. Like Elias (1986), Elias and Scotson (1994) illustrate the complex character of gender, and particularly identify situations in which the balances of power can tilt in favour of some women. As will be shown, the idea that both

women and men can be empowered at the expense of other males and females is useful in understanding the complexities and ambiguities of female body image and femininities in this study.

The complexity of the sex/gender dynamic is one other key theme emerging from Elias's work. As Dunning and Maguire (1996) and Dunning (1999) point out, the biology-culture 'problem' remains unresolved. However, from a process-sociological perspective, it is emphasised that the fundamental interdependence between females and males is simultaneously rooted in bio-psychological and socio-cultural dimensions (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 306; Dunning, 1999, p. 227). Gender relations, and gender identities and habituses, are constructed and reconstructed on biological as well as socio-cultural foundations. In sport and exercise, gendered behavioural and emotional expressions are formed in terms of the interweaving of people's biological, psychological and socio-cultural dimensions (Maguire, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2004; Maguire et al., 2002). Having identified some of the core themes in Elias's work that concern the study of gender relations, the next section briefly introduces a wider body of figurational / process-sociological work that addresses issues surrounding sporting bodies and gender relations.

1.5 Figurational Sociology and the Study of Sport and Gender

Figurational concerns about gender and sport have tended to focus on sports as sites for the "inculcation, expression and perpetuation of masculine habituses, identities, behaviour and ideals" (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 295). Yet, the focus on male identities and behaviours in the context of shifting power dynamics still offers important insights into sport and gender relations (see, for example, Dunning, 1986; Sheard & Dunning, 1973; Maguire, 1986; Dunning et al., 1982, 1988). More recent figurational work has explored the relationships between feminisms and figurational sociology (Colwell, 1999; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Mansfield & Maguire, 1999). Other figurationists have explored female and male experiences of sport in an explicitly relational manner

(Dunning, 1999; Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Waddington et al., 1998). In chapter 3, I examine in more detail, the contributions that figurational sociologists have made to understanding sport and gender. Here, I wish to identify the themes of a figurational analysis of sport and gender relations.

In terms of understanding problems of gender and sport, the themes identified in the previous section are central. So too is the intention of figurational / process-sociologists to consider gender in relational and processual terms. With these themes and intentions in mind, and as noted elsewhere in this thesis in relation to the relationship between a feminist and figurational analysis of gender and sport, Dunning (1999) suggests five main ways in which Elias's theories about civilizing processes can shed light on issues of sport and gender. These include an examination of: "(1) the meaning/significance of sport for males who remain committed to variants of traditional male identities and roles; (2) the relative empowerment of females to an extent sufficient to allow them to challenge with increasing success for entry into what started out as an exclusively male preserve; (3) the corresponding changes at an ideological and value level regarding what constitute socially acceptable 'feminine' habituses and behaviour; (4) the reactions of males who feel threatened by the increasing 'encroachment' of females into this former male preserve; and (5) the motivational sources which lead growing numbers of females to want to take up sport and their reaction to men – and women – who seek more or less consciously to block their entry.

In chapter 3, I review some of the literature that harnesses these figurational / process sociological themes for understanding gender and sport. The main purpose of this section has been to emphasise the potential of using Elias's perspectives in studies of sport and gender. It has been introduced in this section and the previous one, that his work, and that of figurational / process-sociologists of sport, can shed light on the production and reproduction of feminine behaviours, identities and habituses in terms of the various and fluctuating balances of power between, and within, groups of women

and men in sport and sport-related contexts. This potential provides the foundation for this research project. Chapters 5 and 6 present examinations of the key findings of this study in light of the theoretical concerns highlighted here. The next section elaborates on the overlapping principles of feminist and figural sociology that have advanced my analysis.

1.6 Feminist-Figural Sociology: The Study of Sport and Gender Relations

I have sought to illustrate that feminisms and figural sociology are not mutually exclusive theories. Here, the fruitfulness of a preliminary synthesis between feminisms and figural sociology is emphasised. Such a synthesis is rooted in a shared desire to produce more adequate explanations about sport and gender (Dunning, 1992). While feminists have been instrumental in pointing out the unexamined masculinist assumptions in the sociological study of sport, figuralists illustrate the importance of examining social processes, like gender, in a relatively detached way. In other words, studies about sport and gender should not privilege either male or female experiences but should consider women and men, femininity and masculinity in relational terms (Murphy et al., 2000). I return to this issue in a discussion of the methodological concerns of this research study in Chapter 4.

Here, it is recognised that more recent feminist work has acknowledged the importance of studying gender in relational terms (Birrell, 1988, 2002; Birrell & Cole, 1994; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton, 1992; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Employing a relational perspective in which researchers focus on the study of social processes over time is an overlapping feature of figural and feminist perspectives. It seems to be the case that feminists and figuralists agree that the development of more adequate knowledge about gender will provide practically useful knowledge for overcoming existing gender inequalities (Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002; Dunning, 2002; Murphy et al., 2002).

There is some degree of interplay between a figurational approach to understanding questions of physical activity, the body and gender relations and the feminist cultural studies project. Drawing on Birrell (1988, p. 482), Birrell (2002, p. 67) and Dunning (1999, p. 226), five themes associated with a feminist-figurational project can be identified. The first concerns the construction of masculine identities and ideology and the production of male power through sport. The second relates to the relative empowerment of females in sporting activities, that is, the extent to which females can, and do challenge and change existing male dominated organisations and values. The third issue relates to what counts as acceptable femininity and the way that feminine ideals and values are reproduced. The fourth theme would involve investigations about the motivations, meanings and significance of women's physicality, and the impact of their involvement, on the construction of their sense of self-identity. The fifth issue concerns the resistant practices of women and men seeking to block women's entry into sport and preserve established sporting structures and ideals. While it is emphasised that the five themes overlap, and that each is relevant to any relational study of gender, sport and exercise, the focus of this research reflects the third and fourth themes. It is concerned with the production, reproduction and negotiation of corporeal ideals of femininity in the health and fitness club environment. Furthermore, the research examines the significance of the female body, and the impact of some women's involvement in working-out, to the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities.

1.7 Concluding Remarks

The principal aim of this chapter has been to examine the relationships between feminism and figurational sociology and to introduce the potential for a preliminary synthesis between the perspectives. The central point of common ground is the emphasis on understanding the dynamic and relational nature of gendered processes through time and space. In addition, some scholars from each perspective seek to

answer the same questions about gender relations. These questions concern both women and men, and femininity and masculinity in relational terms, and focus on the changing character of gender power relations over time and across cultures. There are tensions between some feminists and figurationists. Their differences centre on the value-orientations of social researchers. In addition, some feminists question the extent to which figurational sociology can and has been useful in advancing funds of knowledge about gender and sport (Hargreaves, 1992, 1994). Furthermore, some figurationists are critical that some feminist accounts about gender and sport are more ideologically-based than knowledge-based (Dunning, 1992; Colwell, 1999). As I have sought to show, if we are able to explore sport and gender relations in a relatively detached way, we are more likely to produce more object-adequate explanations.

In order to illustrate further the relationship between feminisms and figurational sociology, the chapter introduced some of Elias's insights into gender relations, as well as identifying the themes of figurational / process-sociological approaches to understanding sport and gender. Emphasising a figurational commitment to the interpretation of gendered social life, it is claimed that one can be a figurational sociologist and a feminist at the same time. Some have argued that the differences between feminisms and figurational suggest a mutual exclusivity between the perspectives (Colwell, 1999; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994). Yet, it is arguably un-Eliasian and a-sociological to read either perspective as if it were the final word and that collaborative ventures are not possible. This closed position represents an insufficiently 'detached' consideration of the relative benefits of a dialogue and potential synthesis between feminism and figurational sociology.

It is not claimed that a feminist-figurational perspective can provide *all* the answers to complex questions about gender relations. It can, however, make a contribution. On this basis, the approach of this research is symptomatic of a beginning in wider and growing investigations of women's experiences of sport and

exercise. It seems to me that thinking in conjunction with both theoretical perspectives has much to offer in enhancing an insight into the ways in which female participation, opportunity, and experience in sport and exercise practices can be more fully understood. As Bourdieu (1990, p. 36) comments on the matter of inter-theoretical approaches; "every sociologist would do well to listen to his/her adversaries as it is in their interest to see what he/she cannot see, to observe the limits of his [sic] vision, which by definition are invisible to him [sic]". Given this, the next chapter identifies and explains how a combination of feminist and figural concepts and theories has been useful in shedding light on issues of gender in this research project.

CHAPTER 2

Feminisms, Figurations and the Fitness Gym: Theoretical Concepts and Issues.

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify and discuss how selected feminist and figural concepts have guided this research on gendered bodies in the health and fitness club setting. It provides a theoretical foundation for the discussions in Chapters 5 and 6. Elias's concept of figurations is used to explain work-out activities as involving networks of interdependent exercisers, bonded together in gender specific ways. The chapter highlights both feminist and figurationist concerns with the centrality of power in relationships and harnesses Elias's (1978, p. 71) explanation of power in the "Game Models" as a way of understanding the relationships between and within groups of women and men. More specifically, Elias's theory of established-outsider relations is introduced as a way of explaining the construction and reconstruction of female I / We images in unequal and shifting gender power balances between dominant and non-dominant groups of females and males in the fitness club context. The chapter then draws on ideas about civilizing processes to explain the relationships between sport and exercise, gender, civilized bodies, and feminine identities and habituses.

2.1 Figurations, Interdependence and Gender Relations

A focus on the central analytical tool of figural sociology; the concept of figurations, is pertinent to this investigation. Elias (1978) used the word figuration to explain the variety of ways that people are inclined towards and bonded with each other. The term figuration reflects the idea that people form webs of interdependent social interaction characterised by power relations of many kinds. Elias's ideas about power will be explored in the next section. This section emphasises that the concept of the figuration was developed as part of a criticism about conventional sociological theorising. In particular Elias was seeking to address and overcome the tendency to

think about human beings in terms of two distinct concepts, 'the individual' and 'society' (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). Elias (1978) regarded such a traditional view of isolated and self-contained individuals as the *Homo-clausus* model of human being. For him, the dichotomous and reifying thinking that arises out of such an approach serves to limit our understanding of human relationships. He argues that sociologists should be concerned with *Homines-aperti*, a term denoting 'open people' who are bonded together in interdependent, plural and dynamic ways (Elias, 1978). Figural sociologists think of individuals and societies as inseparable and interdependent. As Elias (1978, p. 130) explains, the concept of figurations "serves as a simple conceptual tool to loosen this social constraint to speak and think as if 'the individual' and 'society' were antagonistic as well as different" (Elias, 1978, p. 130). It follows then that the concept of figurations harnesses the *Homines-aperti* model of human being.

Along with the concept of *interdependence*, the idea of *process* is a key feature of Elias's ideas about figurations. Encouraging sociologists to think processually, he was concerned with avoiding static representations of dynamic social interdependence; a tendency referred to as "process-reduction" (Mennell, 1992, p. 253). In emphasising that it is misleading to think of social structures as separate from individuals, Elias considered it more useful to think of what are experienced as 'social forces' as being produced and reproduced by the interplay of the actions of countless individual people. Paraphrasing Elias (2000, p. 366), the plans and actions of individual people can result in patterns of social life that no single person has designed or created. In other words, the consequences of human interaction are "*relatively autonomous*" from individually planned action (Murphy et al., 2000, p. 92). Throughout his work, Elias refers to the production of these unplanned outcomes as 'blind' social processes. Elias's (2000, p. 482) reference to "social dances" explains more fully what he meant by figurations. He stated that:

One should think of a mazurka, a minuet; a polonaise, a tango or rock 'n' roll. The image of the mobile figurations of interdependent people on a dance floor perhaps makes it easier to imagine states, cities, families and also capitalist, communist and feudal systems as figurations. By using this concept we can eliminate the antithesis, resting finally on different values and ideals, immanent today in the use of the words "individual" and "society". One can certainly speak of "dance" in general, but no one will imagine a dance as a structure outside the individual or a mere abstraction. The same dance figurations can certainly be danced by different people; but without a plurality of reciprocally oriented and dependent individuals, there is no dance. Like every other social figuration, a dance figuration is relatively independent of the specific individuals forming it here and now, but not of individuals as such. It would be absurd to say that dances are mental constructions abstracted from observations of individuals considered separately. The same applies to all other figurations. Just as the small dance figurations change – becoming now slower, now quicker – so too, gradually or more suddenly, do the large figurations which we call societies.

This study is principally concerned with the small figurations that people form when they exercise at health and fitness clubs. The concept of figurations can be fruitfully used in understanding more specific questions about gender, sport and exercise. Thinking in terms of figurations has been useful in this study. Put simply, women's and men's participation in any game, such as netball, hockey, soccer, rugby or basketball, or their involvement in activities like aerobics, circuit training and weight training can be said to take place within sport and exercise figurations. Such figurations are not isolated from the wider society in which they take place. Rather, the relations between women and men are affected by the nature and structure of the society in which they live.

Work-out activities, then, represent exercise figurations in micro-contexts that are located within a wider figurational network already defined in the Introduction as the 'exercise / body-beautiful complex'. Women and men who find themselves in exercise figurations are bonded in both enabling and constraining ways to the interdependent social relations they form with other people. In Eliasian terms, then relations between the sexes in the health club setting are characterised by a "fundamental interdependence" (Dunning, 1999, p. 227). These bonds may be 'short'. For example, exercising involves face-to-face contact between people. At the same time, women and men are bonded, in gender specific ways, into longer chains of human interdependence. So, the actions of many people who form part of a broader context of sport and exercise may also indirectly influence each other's experiences and behaviours in the health club. It will be seen in this study, for example, that the practices and ideologies associated with physical education in schools, the family, the media, diet and health technologies, sport sciences and the fitness industry have a gendered resonance on women's and men's physicality.

Whatever the precise characteristics of these direct and indirect bonds, they are not fixed or static. As in other social settings, the health club is a site for the formation of a multitude of complex and dynamic interdependencies that reflect both personal and public processes of gender construction and expression. Relationships change in connection with the many and varied interactions that women and men have with other women and men in the gym, and in broader social contexts. For example, the public image of aerobics and working-out emphasises the development of idealised bodies through fat loss, improved muscular tone and increased fitness levels. Such body sculpting practices are publicly associated with an outer body that reflects sex appeal and, for some, are connected with an inner sense of femininity. Yet, women and men do not completely submit to such idealised images. Nor are they totally constrained by them. As will be seen, the women I have interviewed are

active in defining their sense of self and many of my respondents experienced liberating feelings of increased self-confidence and emotional freedom from being physically active. The gym or dance studio was also perceived to be a safe haven and 'time out' from the demands of work; partners and children. So, too, was it a place to meet and make friends.

The interdependence of women and men in the health club setting involves, like all figural interdependencies, balances of power or power ratios (Elias, 1978). What is central to the dynamic balance of power between women and men in any social setting is "not only the relative capacities of males and females to control economic, political and symbolic/ideological resources, but also their relative capacities to use violence and bestow sexual favours on each other or withhold them" (Dunning, 1999, p. 227). Chapters 5 and 6 focus on aspects of female habitus and behaviour in the context of shifting gender power relations in the fitness gym. It will be seen that the capacities that both females and males have for controlling tacit resources, and bestowing or withholding what others want, are evident in the relations between and within groups of women and men in this study. Such relations have a bearing on the production and reproduction of gendered identities and habituses. In the next section I shall explore some of the ways that a figural approach can shed light on some of the complexities and ambiguities of gender power relations in sporting contexts.

2.2 Figurations, Gender and Issues of Power

Throughout his work, Elias was concerned with the centrality of power in all human relationships. Similarly, contemporary feminism seeks to understand power relations between and within groups of women and men in terms of the dimensions of, *inter alia*, class, race and ethnicity, (dis)ability and sexuality (Birrell, 1988, 2002; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). This seems to me to be a question of relative balances of power; a central feature of a figural approach,

and one which may shed further light on the complexities of gender power in sport and exercise. Let me try to explain why, by firstly elaborating on Elias's ideas about power and interdependence as explained by the "Game Models" (Elias, 1978, p. 71).

The Game Models represent an intellectual aid to understanding the power networks that characterise all social processes (Elias, 1978). They help in two ways. First, with the help of the models, it is possible to draw out, emphasise and explain the processual character of human relationships and, thus avoid static representations of social processes. Second, the models help to illustrate how human relationships change when distributions of power alter (Elias, 1998b). It is argued in this section that the Game Models are particularly useful in understanding the character of gender power in this research.

It was Elias's contention that in order to understand people's behaviours and emotions one must consider how and to what extent people are bonded to each other. In other words, consideration must be made of the needs through which people become interdependent with each other. Such needs include those associated with physical, emotional, intellectual and material well-being (Elias, 1998b). Sometimes, balances of power between people develop because those people have value to each other. In other words, the balance of power between human beings is present whenever there is "functional interdependence" between them (Elias, 1998b, p. 116). It is also possible that balances of power develop in situations where people place no value on the relationship between themselves and another human being. For example, parents might kill an un-wanted baby ! Elias's (1978) argument then, centres on the idea that the degree to which people depend on others in any particular sense, is characterised by reciprocal relationships which involve varying degrees of inequality. The consequence of human interdependence then is an uneven balance of power (power ratio) that impacts on the behaviour and emotions of

the people in such relationships. It is more usual that one or more persons in any social relationship tend to be *more* dependent on other people.

Elias (1978) further explains the relationship between power and interdependence by highlighting that when one or more persons have the capacity to withhold what another wants, the former has a function for the latter. The concept of function is used in a relational sense here. So, in understanding the nature of the social functions people have for each other it is necessary to explain how some people are able to exert constraint over others. The potential that some people have for withholding what others want represents a power of constraint. Such potential is usually uneven in that the constraining power of one group is greater or lesser than another. Such constraining effects reflect the tensions and conflicts that are characteristic of the interdependent functions between people. In addition, power balances are at least “bi-polar” and more usually “multi-polar” (Elias, 1998b, p. 116). Given these comments, it is now appropriate to explain how the Game Models serve to illuminate that power is not “an amulet”, possessed in any absolute fashion by one person and not another (Elias, 1998b, p. 116). Rather, power is relational in character and is best understood in terms of who has more or less power in specific social conditions.

2.3 Power and Interdependence; “The Primal Contest” and “The Game Models”

Elias (1978) precedes his discussion of the game models with the Primal Contest that serves to explain the relationships between two groups who are unregulated by a set of rules. His reasoning here was to counter the assumptions of sociological theories that imply that ‘norms’ (social rules) are central to social relationships. The Primal Contest illustrates the possibility that human relationships can be structured yet ungoverned by rules. Such a model is useful in understanding human contests without rules such as some wars, revolutions, rebellions and massacres (Elias, 1998b, p. 117). While this research is not concerned with any such

contests, Elias's reasoning in the Primal Contest serves to illustrate that in order to understand human behaviour, it is necessary to consider the forces exerted by people on each other by virtue of their interdependence and not simply the rules or norms by which they are to varying degrees constrained. In addition, Elias's argument is relevant in terms of gender as I point out below.

In the Primal Contest, Elias presents the scenario of two tribal groups hunting for food. Food is scarce and such a situation creates an increasingly intense rivalry between what Elias refers to as tribes A and B. In tribe A, the women and men are more physically powerful than those in tribe B. In addition, tribe A has fewer young people and children. While the people of tribe B are physically smaller than those of tribe A, the former are younger and quicker on their feet than the latter. The rivalry between the two tribes is reflected in the killing of tribe A members by those of tribe B at night and the subsequent revenge attacks on the women and children of tribe B by the men of tribe A. While Elias (1978) does not explore the gendered aspect of such attacks, they are noteworthy. Presumably, the revenge killing reflects the relative inability of women and children to defend themselves against men, an attempt at annihilating the reproductive capacity of tribe B and, perhaps a strategy to damage an aspect of the emotional function that the women and men of tribe B have for each other. That said, the overall function of each tribe is founded on hostility and conflict rather than any harmonious cooperative orientation. The relationship between the tribes is based on the functional interdependence between them. The relationships between the two sides may not have rules, yet there is a clearly structured process of interaction between them. In competing for food, the actions of one tribe determine, to a greater or lesser degree, the behaviour of the other. And, as briefly noted, these actions may have a gendered dimension.

On the basis of Elias's reasoning so far, the Primal Contest demonstrates that it is only possible to understand the actions of two groups if one considers the

“compelling forces” exerted by each group on the other as a consequence of their interdependence (Elias, 1998b, p. 118). Elaborating on his ideas about power relations, Elias (1978) presents The Game Models as models to explain social processes *with* rules. By analysing the changing power potentials between people, The Game Models offer a “simplifying intellectual experiment” to help sociologists with the task of understanding human relationships (Elias, 1998b, p. 121). These models are outlined below. It is argued that utilising The Game Models, it is possible to bring out the processual nature of gendered relationships between and among interdependent women and men. At the same time, such an approach can demonstrate that the gendered character of human interaction shifts as the distribution of power changes.

2.4 Gender and Two-Person Games

The first of Elias's models begins with the simple example of two individuals engaged in social interaction. This two-person game is intended to reflect a situation in which player A is stronger and has control over a weaker player, B. In this example, A has the potential to force B to act in a certain way. It can be said that A has a relatively high “capacity to compel” (Elias, 1998b, p. 122). Such a situation also means that A has a relatively high degree of control over the result of the game. But, at the same time, B has *some* degree of power in that player A must act in accordance with the actions of player B. Elias's point here is that the power one person or group has over another may be greater or lesser but is never total. To re-emphasise one of the basic tenets of the figurational approach, the concept of power is not absolute, but is relational. Given this, it makes sense for Elias to talk of the *power ratios* or *power differences* between people that reflect the characteristically uneven balance of power in human relationships.

How can the image of people playing a game serve to make the problem of gender power more accessible to sociological investigation? First, it is noteworthy

that Elias emphasises that “The difficulties encountered in reflecting on problems of power stem from the polymorphous nature of sources of power” (Elias, 1998b, p. 132). Implied in this statement, although not explored in detail in Elias’s explanation of the Game Models is the idea that there are many possible sources of power which can be accessible to people. Taking a feminist perspective on the two-person game model would lead to the argument that one of those sources of power is based on gender. So, from a feminist-figurational perspective the two-person game becomes the two-person *gender* game. Second, and of central concern in this study is that problems of gender power can be more adequately understood if power is conceived of as a structural characteristic of all human relationships. So in the case of the two-person game, A’s relationship to B is always, at the same time, B’s relationship to A. Let me try to explain this idea by giving a gendered example from this study of a fitness gym.

There are many reasons for the functional interdependence between two people that reflect the gendered nature of human interaction generally, and within sporting contexts specifically. There is evidence of two-person gender games in the findings of this research. As will be revealed in Chapter 5, gendered relationships in the gym are characterised by power invested in the body. For example, there were some individual women whose fitness and dieting actions were more dependent on the attention and attitudes of individual men. In this situation, power seems to favour the views of some men in terms of achieving a particular corporeal look deemed to be (heterosexually) feminine. Yet, at the same time, these particular men depended on their attachment to particular individual women who matched their ideals of femininity to bolster their own sense of heterosexual masculinity. The woman’s dependence on the man is also the man’s dependence on the woman. Such an example is one relating to what might be considered a more typical relationship between women and men in the gym and arguably in wider social circles. Yet Elias’s ideas about power

enable a more graphic exploration of gender power than the previous illustration suggests. For example, it was also evident that some individual women were more dependent on other individual women for status in the gym environment. For one woman, A, the high status of her slim and muscularly toned body was, in part, achieved and sustained by woman B who held such an image in high regard and aspired to achieve the same look. At the same time woman B was dependent on the physical appearance of woman A in structuring her own behaviour in the gym such that she could indeed achieve the desired body image. There are other examples in this research of two-person gender games. These will be explored in Chapter 5. Each one serves to illustrate the usefulness of Elias's Game Models in understanding gender relationships in terms of unequal and shifting power ratios.

One final comment on two-person games is necessary at this juncture. As Elias explains, the superiority of one person (person A) over another (person B), as in the examples above does not remain constant. There were several cases in this research where the power differential between two people at the gym decreased. Such a situation might have arisen when the power of a superior woman was lessened through a loss of fitness, or gain in body weight, or when the power of an inferior woman was increased through improvements in fitness, performance or physique. Under either condition A's power over B diminishes proportionately and B's chances of controlling A increase correspondingly. When the distribution of power changes such that the differential between two person's strength decreases then "the less power will either player have to force a particular tactic on the other" (Elias, 1998b, p. 122). What this means is that the game becomes less reflective of individual planned action. To paraphrase Elias, in a situation of decreasing power potential between two people, and through the interweaving of moves of those two people, a game process will develop which has not been planned by either of them (Elias, 1998b, p. 123). Such a comment introduces the fact that human relationships

are not only ones involving relatively simple direct interaction between two people. As a way of understanding the complexities of human relationships and the various networks of power that characterise them, Elias (1998) goes on to explain Multi-person Games at several levels. These models also have something to say about gender power and are outlined in the next section.

2.5 Gender and Multi-person Games on One Level

The increasing complexity of relationships in two-person games can be illustrated by taking an example where player A engages in simultaneous and independent contests with several weaker players. The networks of power in such an example are similar to the two-person games outlined in the previous section. A number of independent two-person game models are being played whereby player A has a relatively high degree of control over each opponent and concomitantly over the course of each contest. This was evidenced in this study in situations where an individual woman or man held a position of relative control in the gym by virtue of having a particular appearance and / or having specific knowledge about achieving desirable body shapes. For example, personal trainers hold high status positions in the gym for both reasons previously noted.

Personal trainers had a relatively high capacity to compel other people in the gym to engage in fitness and dietary regimes aimed at achieving a desired physical appearance and mastery of technique. That said, the personal trainer might become disadvantaged if the number of independent simultaneous games increases beyond that which she or he could pursue. This does not necessarily mean that the dominance of the personal trainer will diminish per se, but that she or he cannot actively engage in an infinite number of relationships independently from one another. Thus, the trainer in the aforementioned example cannot directly affect all people who work out at the gym. Her or his power to define a particular body image is not total.

Another situation of shifting power ratios might be where player A plays a single game against a group of weaker players at the same time. In this case there is increasing doubt about the distribution of power between A and the opposing group. The formation of the opposition, albeit of weaker players has the potential to decrease the authority of player A. In terms of gender, an example illustrating this model can be shown with reference to the fitness gym. The fitness class instructor holds a relatively high degree of power over her or his group of participants in terms of defining standards and forms of performance and bodily appearance. Each one of the participants in a fitness class, has relatively less power than the instructor. However, there are several means by which the group of weaker players might challenge the authority of the instructor. For example, it was observed that some groups of participants would engage in their own variations of particular exercises. They chose not to slavishly follow the instructions of the class leader in terms of technique and patterns of performance. In addition, some participants displayed bodies that would be described as fat, over-weight and out-of-shape. Arguably, such displays challenge dominant images of lean and muscularly toned bodies.

What will be drawn out more fully in Chapter 5 is that, as in the previous example, the existence of no tensions within the opposing group would be an advantageous power tactic against the dominant person. The reverse also applies. So, increased tensions within the opposing group serve to increase the chances of the stronger player, A, controlling the opposition and the course of the game. As in the two-person game model, If A's power decreases relative to the opposing group then her chances of controlling the people she is playing against and the course of the game also decrease. It follows that the power chances of the group increase. It becomes ever more clear that with increasing complexity of human interaction comes an increasing uncertainty about the control, planning and outcome of the game. Elias

elaborates on the power dynamics of more complex relationships in his multi-person game models at several levels. These are explored in the next section.

2.6 Gender and Multi-person Games on Several Levels

In developing an intellectual aid to understanding human relationships involving many people, Elias presents his multi-person game models at several levels. In these models, the scenario is one in which the numbers of players in a game are continually growing. Each player has to wait before she or he can make a suitable move. Under such conditions, it becomes increasingly difficult for individuals to form an accurate mental picture of the process of the game. Players are less able to determine the course and outcome of the game than was the case in two-person games. While the game figuration is the framework for each person's actions, it becomes increasingly "opaque and uncontrollable" to them (Elias, 1998b, p. 125). Such problems lead to players becoming disorientated. The functioning of the game disintegrates and there is increasing pressure on people to alter their groupings and re-organise themselves. There are many ways in which people might re-group and many possibilities for the networks of power. So, what do Elias's ideas about these possibilities say about gender?

Elias's (1998b) makes specific comment about Two-tier Games Models (Oligarchic Type) and Game Models on Two Levels (Simplified, Increasingly Democratic Type). Each of these "Multi-Person Games on Several Levels" is perhaps more relevant for explaining problems of gender on a larger social scale than this project is able to do (Elias, 1998, p. 124). However, in illustrating that the course of a game played by tens, hundreds and thousands of people cannot be controlled and guided by any one of those players Elias's models sensitises us to thinking about gender in a particular theoretical way that might help to further an explanation of gender relations. What I mean here is that although *individuals* in my research can provide illustrations about the gender / power relations in the health club setting, no

one person exercises power over all of the others, for example, in respect of defining what counts as acceptable appearance and display of femininity and masculinity. Such a position seems to me to add to the critique of feminist standpoint epistemology made in the previous chapter. Let me try to clarify. Elias's ideas run counter to the feminist standpoint claim that only those individuals who live through the experiences under investigation are able to offer adequate interpretations. Elias's thinking supports the idea that gender issues are not exclusively centred on individual women. Rather, researching femininity *and* masculinity can further an understanding of gender relations. In addition, his ideas lead to the fact that not all women are equally oppressed. Different women and men have different experiences, knowledge and relationships to gender and other forms of power inequalities. Elias's work, then, like that of some feminists illustrates that gender is not a universal category.

In terms of gender relations the course of any game is not in the hands of any one player. It is also the case that the gendered game itself has some control over the thoughts and actions of the individual gym users in the current context of this study. As Elias (1998b, p. 134) puts it, the actions and emotions of people "need to be understood and explained within the framework of the game". The notion of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex' defined in the Introduction is meant to demonstrate that there are many more individuals that are influential in defining idealised femininity and masculinity than those who exercise at the particular gym under scrutiny. Multitudes of people are bonded together across great distances by the specialisation of their function in the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. Their level of integration is extremely complex. If this project is to make any contribution to knowledge about gender relations, then the explanations made must not be based on cause and effect explanations or in terms of the individual character of particular actors. Rather, they must be founded on an adequate analysis of the "progressive interweaving" of peoples actions in specific exercise figurations. This is because gym users use

exercise figurations to orientate themselves in terms of their gendered thoughts and behaviours.

These preliminary comments about Elias's thinking on power illustrate that the Game Models can shed light on the complexities of gender power in direct and indirect relationships between people. Elias's work does not serve to solve problems of gender power. However, the Game Models help in presenting more adequate and graphic explanations of gender power as well as discouraging thinking that considers the concept of relationship as a static one. What can be concluded at this juncture is that gender relationships are complex and contingent upon the power balances that characterise sports and other settings.

One of the outcomes of Elias's conceptualisation of power was his theory of established-outsider relations. Established-outsider theory has been a useful aid in explaining the production and reproduction of female I/We images in unequal and shifting gender power ratios between dominant and non-dominant groups of women in this study. These ideas are introduced in the next section.

2.7 Gender and Established-Outsider Relations

Elias's book with John Scotson, The Established and the Outsiders was based on a study of social relations of a community on the outskirts of Leicester, UK, towards the middle of the twentieth century. Elias and Scotson (1994) sought to explain power tensions between dominant and non-dominant groups in a community referred to as Winston Parva. The main focus of the study concerned the relationships between three neighbourhoods. One neighbourhood (zone 1) was identified by occupational statistics as middle class. This zone was set apart from the others by its large houses and professional residents. Zone 1 was considered by the community of Winston Parva to be the *best* area to live in. One of the two working class neighbourhoods, The Village (zone 2), consisted of a group of residents established over two or three generations. Zone 3,

The Estate, represented another group of working class residents who were newcomers to the area. The Estate residents were the *outsiders* (Elias and Scotson, 1994).

Elias and Scotson (1994) observed distinct patterns of stigmatization used by the established group in relation to the outsider group. Processes of stigmatization were related to the differential characteristics of the social bonds between and among people of zones 2 and 3. Mechanisms of stigmatization involved the monopolization of key positions of power, and selective and distorting dimensions of gossip within the community. These aspects of established-outsider theory, along with the ideological construction of We/They images served to reinforce divisions between The Village and The Estate.

Examining the social relations of the health club setting, established-outsider theory can help to explain the processual relations that afford greater power chances to specific women in exercise figurations. The theory also has much to offer in understanding the complexities of gender inequality more broadly. Four characteristics of established-outsider theory that might shed light on the pattern and process of gender power relations in exercise settings are set out below.

First, the social interdependencies of the health club community, like all social contexts, are marked by unequal power ratios. Power is invested in the body. Established women, for example, are empowered by access to, and correct application of, knowledge about exercise and other body management techniques. Tacit knowledge concerns knowing about exercise conducive to fat loss, muscular toning techniques and dietary manipulation. In the health club setting, the achievement of a slender, firm and shapely body, as well as high levels of fitness and expertise in exercising, differentiate higher status women from lower status women. As will be seen, one of the findings of the research was that power ratios between superior and inferior women generated group charisma and group disgrace. Group charisma was reflected in the experience of gratifying emotions, felt by women who had achieved an acceptable physique and a

mastery of exercise. Established women in the fitness gym embodied the dominant images of idealised femininity. Those who did not meet appropriate bodily standards tended to feel disgrace in the form of shame and embarrassment about their physical appearance and performance.

Second, a continual exchange of 'gossip' about female bodies served to stigmatize outsider / other images of feminine beauty and physicality. This was evident in gossip between and within dominant and non-dominant groups of women. Fat and unfit bodies were discredited as unattractive and symbolic of a lack of discipline and self-control. A heightened sense of self-esteem was felt in relation to adherence to the norms of superior female bodies. In addition, others held those people who had achieved a desirable bodily appearance in high regard. Distaste for *other* bodily shapes and sizes was commonly expressed. Processes of stigmatization served to maintain the relatively high status of established female bodies in the health club context.

Third, the 'socio-dynamics of stigmatization' (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. xix) reinforced the superiority of narrowly defined We-ideals of femininity at the same time as supporting the inferior status of They-images of female appearance and physicality. Gossip networks between established and outsider women were a fundamental part of the construction and reconstruction of We/They ideals. Selecting and talking about the most flattering and least flattering aspects of female bodies served to support dominant ideals of physical slenderness, firmness and fitness. Established images of slimness, muscular tone and performance were reinforced by the wider agencies of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. Yet, the women in this study seemed unable to completely reject narrowly defined ideals for female bodies. The reason for this is that they agreed that femininity and sexual attractiveness were defined by the established 'look'. An inferior collective We-ideal of femininity was internalised into the self-image of outsider women. A corresponding, favourable, collective We-ideal was incorporated into the individual image of women who have achieved the body-beautiful.

As will be shown, the biographies of the women interviewed revealed that they shared similar experiences of physical activity and physical education. Drawing on Elias's ideas about identity, identification, and habitus, Chapter 6 examines how shared life-histories are the foundation for the development of collective We-ideals (Elias, 1996; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). Both established and outsider women had common memories of being physically active. These women had internalised likes and dislikes about female bodies and body management routines on the basis of their sporting biographies. The evidence in this study supports the idea of the developmental character of habitus. Gradually, in the long-term, these women had developed a feminine habitus characterised by a predisposition to appear slender and toned and a preference for cosmetic fitness activities.

Fourth, there are links between established-outsider theory and the theory of civilizing processes. These links shed further light on gender relations in sport and exercise. The established image of femininity, already defined, was also constructed as more respectable and distinguished. The women I interviewed, most commonly described slender female bodies as 'better', 'attractive', or 'good'. Conversely, non-dominant body images (too fat, too thin or too muscled) were described as 'bad', 'ugly' or 'worse'. Constructing a superior body, as opposed to an inferior one, demands a "higher degree of self-restraint", "more firmly regulated behaviour" and greater foresight in relation to the body, exercise and dietary regimens (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 153). In this sense, superior female bodies may be described as more civilized than those bodies they claim a higher status over.

2.8 Gender, Civilized Bodies and Civilizing Processes

Though it is rarely a dominant theme in figurational examinations of sport, the body is central to the figurational perspective (Shilling, 1993; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). Having said that, some figurational work has made explicit reference to the social significance of the body in the development and practice of sport (Maguire, 1999, 2002,

2004). The centrality of the body in Elias's (1983, 1997, 2000) ideas is reflected in his argument that the historical development in western countries towards more self-controlled and less externally controlled behavioural and emotional acts involves wide and diverse changes in standards of conduct for humans at individual and societal levels. Taking a long-term developmental view, he emphasises that human beings learn to control their bodily appearance, actions, and emotions according to changing social environments. What are considered to be civilized bodies, at least in contemporary western societies, are characterised by self-restraint and rationalization, learned via processes of human interaction. Burkitt's (1991) account of civilized personalities, power relations and interdependencies reflects Elias's ideas about civilizing processes

Burkitt (1991) presents a detailed investigation of Elias's work in developing his theories of the social formation of personality. In his work, he supports one of the basic tenets of Elias's approach. In doing so, Burkitt (1991) emphasises that human relations are characterised by fluctuating balances of power that are formed by historical networks of interdependencies between people. Furthermore, Burkitt (1991) argues that the theory of civilizing processes demonstrates how processes within particular figurations shape our behaviour and our personalities. He draws specifically on Elias's ideas about the changing mental and emotional structure of personalities evident in transformations of expressive behavior in the context of the court nobility since the Middle Ages. Evidence of such fluctuations in personality is reflected in instructions, through books, regarding polite standards of behaviour, increasing pressure to refine behaviour to win the respect of others from higher social positions, and moreover, the more commonplace expression of aggression via non-violent competitive strategies. Burkitt (1991, p. 171) points out that careful management of "'innermost' feelings" and "'outward' identity" were salient, for example, in the status enhancement of the fifteenth century court nobility. Given this, the development of "rational modes of thought" characterised by long-term planning of behaviour to gain the respect of others

symbolises the development of a particular type of personality constructed within a specific figurational context (Burkitt, 1991, p. 171). So, it can be said that according to Elias, evidence of the refinement of behaviour during the Renaissance signalled the emergence of a distinctive character / personality of the court.

Burkitt (1999, p. 52) indicates that the civilized forms of behaviour at court have over time, filtered through the social classes and are reflected in contemporary society. He explains that internalised norms operate to regulate the expressions and relations between people. Such internalised behavioural and emotional rules stem from very long term social changes. As has been noted already, the historical transformations that Elias seeks to explain are indicative of gendered civilizing processes. Chapter 1 also illustrated that the study of sport and exercise figurations can illustrate these gendered civilizing processes *in vivo*. One other example of gendered civilizing processes is the long-term trend towards the physical emancipation of women since the late 19th century that corresponds with women's relative constraint by traditional gender divisions in sport and exercise (Dunning, 1999; Dunning & Maguire, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994; McCrone, 1988). There is evidence in this regard that social sanctions about what constitutes acceptable female appearance and demeanour are learned, internalised, and become self imposed (Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton, 1992; Sharpe, 1994; Young, 1990). What will be shown in Chapter 6 is that Elias's ideas about civilizing processes help to make sense of the corporeal experiences of some gym users in this study.

In terms of Shilling's (1993) perspective on Elias, it will become apparent that civilized bodies are developed through processes of socialisation, rationalization and individualisation. Furthermore, Shilling (1993) comments that civilized bodies are managed in gendered ways. In the micro-context of working out, I suggest that the women I have observed, and spoken with experience civilizing processes that correspond with popular cultural ideals about female bodies. This is not to say that there is only one, fixed image of femininity. As previously noted with regard to established-

outsider relations, feminine ideals shift with the passage of time and are contoured by the structures and belief systems of social life and specific sports settings that are, themselves, marked by processes of change. There are many images of femininity (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Markula, 1995; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Willis, 1994). But the evidence in this study, as will be seen, is that contemporary beauty is characterised, to a large extent, by lean, muscularly toned and fit female bodies. These bodies signify success and sexual attractiveness.

The gym is a place where female physiques are sculpted and monitored. Self-surveillance and other-surveillance tactics extend to wider socio-cultural experiences, images, and ideologies, both past and present. The civilized female bodies that are 'worked-out' in the gym and dance studio are symbolised by a rationalized command of the techniques, practices and rituals of exercise and by an established bodily appearance (Shilling, 1993, 1997). Gym culture institutionalises gendered codes of body management that differentiate between people on the basis of their bodily worth. Women's status in the gym is based on successful management of their exercise regimes and their bodily appearance. As in the court societies that Elias (1983) studied, bodies are central to the value system of the gym. The dominant corporeal look is revered within specific exercise settings, advocated through the images and messages of the 'exercise body-beautiful-complex' and arguably dominates the body politics of (white, middle class) western societies. Achieving the body-beautiful is status enhancing and is associated with an internalised disposition towards bodily control and discipline.

The women I have interviewed, and the women and men I have observed, have developed a taste for cosmetic fitness activities. Their preference for body sculpting type exercise reflects civilizing processes at an individual level (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). As infants and children they acquire dominant adult standards of gendered behaviour, emotion and appearance. They learn, gradually, what the distinctions are between femininity and masculinity. In the health club setting, as I shall show, my female

respondents subscribe to a particular image of femininity that embraces the slender female as heterosexually attractive. At another level, these women's bodily tastes, and exercise preferences, reflect both the longer term civilizing processes of the British society in which they live, and of humanity as a whole (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). These women's notional ideals regarding what counts as acceptably female / feminine have been shaped by gendered standards of behaviour, feeling and appearance over many generations. This point is discussed and illustrated further in the next section. I wish to emphasise here that civilizing processes at an individual level are not 'absolute beginnings' nor are such processes at a societal level. Elias (1998b, p. 18) was quite explicit on this point when he stated that:

Just as every individual lifetime civilizing process is a part of a longer-term development in a particular society, so also are civilizing processes in every society parts of still longer-term civilizing processes which encompass humanity as a whole.

This idea constitutes what Elias (2000, p. xi) refers to as the 'socio-genetic ground rule'; a concept he uses to help explain that every human being passes through a civilizing process in order to achieve the standard of behaviour in a particular society, though not through each aspect of the social civilizing process (Elias, 2000; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). It is my contention that, in their lifetime, and through a life-long engagement in sport and exercise, adults, and their *grown-up* standards of female and male physicality, have moulded my participants. The women interviewed had internalised a widely accepted, and specifically defined image of femininity that is perpetuated by the personnel of the 'exercise body-beautiful-complex'.

It is not the case that women or men completely succumb to established body images, or that physical activity is a negative experience. Personal feelings of self-confidence and admiration from others reflect the emotional gains to be had from disciplining the body. This relative freedom of expression in physical activity may well

represent the enhanced social liberation of some women in contemporary societies. Yet, it also masks a more private discrimination. Some of women I spoke to were publicly empowered via the achievement of the body-beautiful perceived by them, and others, to be attractive and, hence, relatively liberating through status enhancement. At the same time, these same women privately feared that their bodies might not measure up to acceptable standards. They felt constrained by a pressure to achieve a particular corporeal look. Both established and outsider women in this study had come to *know* and accept a particular set of ideals about what shape, size and weight counted as feminine. It seems that these women internalised and adhered to a set of rules, individually contoured yet pertaining to socially acceptable notions of contemporary feminine beauty. Feelings of shame, embarrassment and repugnance were expressed when these women did not successfully control the shape and tone of their bodies.

The discussion above supports the idea that, in sport and exercise, civilizing processes persist along gender lines. In explaining the development of civilized bodies Elias's work provides a foundation for understanding sport and exercise as sites for the production and reproduction of feminine identities, habituses and behaviour. The next section explains how this might be so.

2.9 Gender, Civilized Bodies, Identities and Habitus

In this section I shall attempt to articulate the relationships between gender, civilized bodies, female identities and habitus. Two characteristics of the civilizing process need emphasising in this connection. *First*, Elias's writings explain that in the long-term, bodily functions are increasingly self-controlled. More particularly, Elias contends that the balance between external controls and self-controls has shifted towards the latter. *Second*, while it is the body that is the medium through which acceptable codes of behaviour are expressed, bodies do not reflect a uniformly ingrained, set pattern of civilizing processes in all people. In other words civilizing processes vary in relation to class, age, ethnicity, (dis) ability and gender. They also vary

between nations. Civilized bodies are, in fact, sites for the production and reproduction of gendered behavioural codes.

The historical development towards increasing bodily control is characterised by habitual self-restraint. The habituation towards self-constraint that characterises the development of a person's habitus is gendered in a number of critical respects. There seem to be links between gender, civilized bodies, habitus development and identity construction. These links derive to a large extent from the fact that the development of behavioural codes and their internalisation both take place in a context of struggles for status (Elias, 1983). On this basis, the acquisition of appropriate gender dispositions serves as a marker of bodily value and self-identity. Prior to exploring issues of distinction, the body and gender identities, however, I shall seek to clarify Elias's conceptualisation of habitus.

In Chapter 3 it is highlighted that several authors have used the notion of habitus in analysing themes and issues of identity construction (Bourdieu, 1978; Dunning, 1999; Elias, 1978, 1997; Maguire, 1993; Mauss, 1973). According to figurational thinking, a person's habitus is characterised by the enduring dispositions that are laid down deep within us through on-going socialisation processes. It can be described as embodied social learning. As far as gender is concerned, throughout the life course, established ideals are internalised within human beings as part of their second-nature. Some illustrations from the literature might serve to support this point.

To some extent, idealised images of femininity and masculinity continue to be reinforced in sporting practices (Connell, 1990; Dunning & Sheard, 1973; Dunning, 1999; Messner & Sabo; 1990; Scraton, 1992; Sharpe, 1994; Willis, 1994). A feminine look, for example, is commonly associated with being slim and petite, with curves in the *right* places. Some girls tend to be directed away from sports and exercise that require strength, power, aggression, and muscularity. Yet, it is also the case that some women are involved, indeed in rapidly growing numbers, in physical activities such as football,

rugby, boxing and weight training which have historically been considered as male preserves (Dunning, 1999; Henry & Comeaux, 1999; Scraton et al., 1999; Wright & Clarke, 1999; Theberge, 2002). This is certainly a challenge to established gender codes. Yet, as will be shown, the evidence in this study suggests that, at the level of habitus and in gym culture, particular established notions of feminine beauty prevail.

In terms of the connection between the internalisation of gendered behaviour and the "search for distinction" (Shilling, 1993, p. 157), Elias (2000, p. 384) explains that civilized bodies, exhibiting stricter control of inborn drives and affects developed over time, at least in Western Europe, "serve as marks of distinction and prestige". One influence on gendered body management can then be related to a desire for a high status body. Cosmetic fitness activities such as aerobics and gym work-outs are sites for the production and reproduction of superior bodies. Both women and men engage in such body shaping activities although aerobics and dance type activities predominantly involve more females than males. In terms of the women I have interviewed and observed, slender, toned and fit bodies are higher status bodies both in the health club setting and, arguably, in the wider society.

Achieving and maintaining a bodily look that is highly valued requires strict control of the body. Performance routines in the gym environment are organised in a precise fashion according to dominant beliefs about what type and intensity of exercise will ensure fat loss and improve muscle shape and tone. My female participants were encouraged to believe that continual rhythmic exercise will help them achieve a slimmer form. Muscular toning exercises focused upon particular body parts that, for some women and men, define women's sex appeal. In the gym and dance studio, much time is invested in tightening, toning and sculpting lithe thighs, pert bottoms, flat stomachs, lean arms and a firm chest as well as reducing overall body fat. Arguably, strongly built, muscular and aggressive women are still not *de rigueur* in sport, exercise or the wider society. There are some sport subcultures that act as sites for resistance to and

negotiation of ideal femininity (Bùnel, 1991; Markula, 1995; Miller & Penz, 1991; Obel, 1996; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996; Theberge, 1995, 2000). Indeed, in this study, there is evidence of diversity in what counts as a feminine physique. Nevertheless, images of young, sleek, lithe women, like tennis players Anna Kournikova and Maria Sharapova, or the beach volleyball professional Gabrielle Reese, are the preferred images of media and advertising material and are part of the taken-for-granted picture that many women and men have of attractive female bodies. *Other* female images transgress gendered codes of physicality. As will be seen, fat women and overly muscular women, for example, were considered by my respondents to be distasteful and hence of a lower status.

The status attached in present-day western societies to idealised forms of female physicality requires a continual monitoring of bodies. Establishing and maintaining a high status body demands foresight. Processes of foresight were evident in the way in which my participants constantly took account of their own, and the bodies of other women in exercise settings and wider social life in order to organise their corporeal habits. Observing their own, and other's behaviour and appearance reflects the civilizing tendency towards 'psychologization' (Elias, 2000). As Elias (1983, 2000) explains in relation to status competition in court societies of the 17th and 18th centuries, observation and experience increasingly permeate rules of conduct. Chapter 6 illustrates that personal observation and psychological insight play a significant part in the construction and re-construction of *We/They* images of femininity. Taking conscious account of people's exercise behaviour and bodily appearance, gym users are involved in relatively high degrees of mutual identification. One of the characteristics of processes of psychologization and mutual identification, is that self and other images are less spontaneous and more purposive. For my participants, the purpose of constant and precise observation is to monitor, manage and seek to control feminine (and masculine)

body ideals. In the fitness gym, the rationale for controlling the body, is the desire for status; a consequence of a superior body image.

The mechanism by which bodies are socially managed in contemporary western societies is related to civilizing processes in another way as well. There is a connection between the monitoring and management of bodies and advancing thresholds of shame and repugnance that has been, according to Elias (2000) increasingly apparent in the habitus of people in the West since the 16th century. For example, the potential for women's bodies to appear un-feminine and unattractive elicits feelings of anxiety in the form of "shame-fear" (Elias, 2000, p. 414). The women interviewed feared that they might not match up to feminine body ideals. Having learned and internalised images of established, superior female bodies, they felt ashamed about their imperfections. This sense of fear was not necessarily directly observable. As Elias (2000, p. 415) notes, shame is not directly evident in the presence of others. Yet, all of my respondents privately described an internal sense of distress about their bodily flaws. The fear of social degradation associated with other / outsider female body images guided my participants towards physical exercise and dietary restriction as ways of achieving a higher status 'look'. Inner anxieties about looking inferior reflect the self-imposed constraints that these women place on their personal appearance. Inseparable from feelings of shame, were expressions of embarrassment about the body. Women felt embarrassed when others transgressed socially acceptable body images. Expressions of disrespect at seeing imperfect bodies characterised the gossip networks in the health club setting.

Some women, it seems, follow narrowly defined codes of exercise behaviour that have become deeply ingrained and that are founded on the cultural signs, symbols and messages of the fitness club setting. The women I have spoken with are not always consciously aware of the particular female habituses I have described. Yet these enduring features of gender are central to their embodied experiences and are a focal

point of common beliefs about femaleness, femininity and gender power relations. Everyday behaviours and experiences like exercise, dieting and beauty treatments can become so familiar that they come to be considered, by some women at least, as natural, normal and rational aspects of being female.

I do not wish to imply that a gendered habitus is fixed and unchallenged. Female (and male) habituses are not biologically determined. Women and men play an active role in forming patterns and meanings of social relations and in the construction of their gendered identities. As will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6, my respondents reinforced and challenged dominant feminine habitus in varying degrees and in terms of the meaning they attached to the techniques, practices and ideologies of work-out activities. Yet, idealised notions of what constitutes socially acceptable femininity still dominate these women's lives and are revealed in their bodily size, shape, volume, postures, gestures and expressions. My findings reveal that, for some physically active women, a feminine habitus is characterised by both a desire to be slender, slim, lean and muscularly toned, and a predisposition to engage in body sculpting exercises.

2.10 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has highlighted that feminist questions and theories about gender can be fruitfully explored by drawing on figural ideas about power relations, established-outsider theory, notions of habitus and 'I/We' images, and theories about civilizing processes. People who work-out in the fitness gym environment form small figurations that are located within a wider figural network of exercise and fitness. The relationships between and within groups of female and male exercisers are characterised by personal and public processes of gender production and expression. Such relationships are marked by balances of power.

Elias's Game Models are presented as a way of understanding the power networks that characterise all social relationships. More specifically, it is argued that the models provide a framework for thinking about gender in a particular theoretical way that

might advance our understanding of gender relations. The chapter introduced the idea that the pattern of gender power relations in the fitness gym can be understood in terms of the capacities that females and males have for controlling resources, and granting or refusing what others want. In Chapter 5 these ideas are examined further to explain the complexities and ambiguities associated with female body image, and the relative capacities of exercisers to control corporeal ideals of femininity. The pattern and process of gender power relations in the fitness gym can be understood in terms of established-outsider theory. Unequal power ratios are invested in exercising bodies, and a continual flow of gossip about bodies serves to stigmatize outsider ('bad', 'unfit', 'out-of-shape', 'fat', 'gross') body images. Chapter 5 explores established-outsider theory to illustrate the processual relations that afford greater power chances to specific women who work-out.

This chapter has also endeavoured to outline that the gender power ratios, characteristic of the relationships between exercisers in the fitness gym, have a bearing on the construction and reconstruction of gendered identities and habitus. Introduced, here, is the observation that the culture of the fitness gym reflects a gendered approach to body management that differentiates between people on the basis of corporeal status. In terms of exercise, the development and internalisation of feminine looks, deportment and behaviour take place in the context of a struggle for status. This idea is used in Chapter 6 to explain that the acquisition of appropriate gender dispositions serves as a marker of bodily value and feminine self-identity. Outlined here, and explored in Chapter 6 are the processes of personal observation, psychological insight, mutual identification, and the mechanisms of shame and embarrassment about the body that are significant in the construction of feminine identities. Prior to discussing the findings of this study, the next chapter presents a review of some of the extant literature concerned with bodies, gender, sport and sport-related contexts.

CHAPTER 3

Bodies, Gender and Sport: A Review of Literature

3.0 Introduction

There is both a popular and an academic fascination with the body. The academic literature concerned with corporeal issues is broad and diverse and informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives. Here, attention is given to some of the work that concentrates on bodies, gender, sport and exercise. The chapter begins with an overview of the apparent neglect of the body in sociological studies and a review of the corporeal themes that have, more recently, come to the fore in the sociology of sport. It outlines some of the perspectives that have been utilised in understanding sporting bodies, and highlights a selection of issues that have arisen in the emerging literature. The influence of feminist theories in bringing the body to prominence in sociology and the sociology of sport is examined. The ways in which Elias's work, and that of several figurational / process-sociologists have shed light on the character of gender / body relations generally, and the gendered character of sporting bodies more specifically, is presented.

Some of the feminist literature that argues for the centrality of the body in understanding gender, sport and exercise is reviewed. The contribution of poststructuralist insights, specifically related to the work of Michel Foucault, is highlighted. The gendered themes in Elias's writings are identified and discussed, and an overview of his ideas about civilized bodies is included. An overview of literature concerned with a figurational / process-sociological approach to the study of sporting bodies and gender relations is offered. The review examines further, the literature in the sociology of sport concerning the body, gender and power relations, and corporeal aspects linked to the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities and habituses. The final part of the chapter considers some of the writing

that concentrates on the relationships between sport, gender, bodies and consumer culture.

3.1 Bodies and the Sociology of Sport: Corporeal Issues and Concerns

Several authors discuss the apparent lack of interest in corporeal issues within sociology and the sociology of sport (Cole, 2002; Frank, 1990, 1991; Hall, 1996; Loy et al., 1993; Maguire, 1993; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1984, 1996; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). The historical neglect of the body in the sociology of sport seems somewhat surprising when several authors including Dunning (1993), Maguire (1993), Theberge (1991) Hargreaves (1987) and Hargreaves (1992, 1994, 2001) emphasise that sport involves embodied experience founded on social meaning and importance. As John Hargreaves (1987, p. 141) states, "it is the body that constitutes the most striking symbol, as well as the material core of sporting activities".

One reason for the "non-body bias" (Frank 1991, p. 36) in sociological studies of sport seems to reflect dualistic thinking that reinforces the dichotomies of mind/body, individual/society, nature/culture, sex/gender and race/ethnicity. Turner's (1984, 1996) observation that a disembodied approach to social theory reflects both traditional associations between corporeality and biological reductionism, and enduring analyses that emphasise *either* individual human action *or* social systems, seems pertinent in understanding the absent body in the sociology of sport. The neglect of the body in sociological accounts of sport can also be linked to the prevailing disembodied discourse of physical education and the sport sciences (Hall, 1996; Loy, 1991; Loy et al., 1993; Maguire, 1991, 1993, 2004). The increasing importance of a performance enhancement ethos and images of the body as a machine have meant that traditional approaches to understanding sporting bodies privilege the natural science sub-disciplines such as physiology, biomechanics, and some aspects of psychology. In the sociology of sport, a preference for examining

the institutional, structural, economic and cultural dimensions of sport, has meant that sociologists have tended to leave bodies to those that claim an objective, rational, individual, biological type of scientific approach to understanding human performance (Hall, 1996; Loy et al., 1991; Maguire, 1991, 1993, 2004). Having said that, the legacy of disembodied sociological investigations is being challenged by many authors whose understanding of sport and society is founded on concerns about the embodied nature of sporting practice (Andrews, 1993; Cole, 1993, 2002; Featherstone et al., 1991; Grunueau, 1993; Maguire, 1993; Maguire et al, 2002).

Much of the work on the body and society generally, and sporting bodies more specifically, focuses on questioning the range of dualisms identified above (Burkitt, 1999; Hall, 1996; Turner, 1996; Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Maguire, 1993; Maguire et al., 2002). In seeking to further an understanding of human embodiment it is emphasised by such authors that the body is both affected by social relations, and forms a foundation for the construction and reconstruction of those relations (Shilling, 1993). Part of this thinking is connected to considerations of the historical relationships between individual bodies and populations of bodies (Morgan & Scott, 1993, Maguire et al., 2002). Furthermore, the idea that social relations impact on bodily dispositions and emotions, and that such corporeal capacities differ in respect of the varied influence of social relations, such as, gender, class, age, dis-ability, race and ethnicity, on bodies comes to the fore in such scholarship. Reflecting these arguments, Maguire et al. (2002, p. 184) explain that "biological, psychological and socio-cultural" aspects of human beings "interweave and find expression in sporting acts". Moreover, sporting behaviours and emotions are socially stratified along, for example, gender, (dis) ability, class, ethnic, and age lines (Maguire, 1992; Maguire et al., 2002).

As will be shown later in this review, feminist scholars have been at the forefront of these ontological debates. However, it should also be noted that within

the emerging literature on the body, some social theorising has not, as yet, moved successfully beyond dichotomous thinking (Hall, 1996; Maguire, 1993). In an in-depth critical examination of Judith Butler's understanding of gendered bodies, for example, Burkitt (1999, p. 94) concludes that in her work "despite all the discourse about the body, one never gets the sense of a lived, material body." Hall (1996) also contends that some feminist writers have reinforced, rather than resolved essentialist arguments about female bodies. A further example of the enduring tendency towards dichotomous thinking about the body can be drawn from Maguire's (1993) review of some theories in the sociology of sport.

Maguire (1993) provides evidence of the difficulty in escaping the dualisms noted previously in a critical analysis of Frank's (1991) typology of the body and its application to sport. Two particular points of argument can be noted from Maguire's (1993) analysis. First, Maguire (1993) contends that in drawing on Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, Frank's work, and concomitantly the ideas of Giddens (1984), reproduce rather than resolve the agency/structure and individual/society debates. For Maguire (1993), Giddens's work is too cognitive and not embodied. Second, there is evidence that Frank's (1991) work reinforces biological arguments about the domination of male bodies. Let me explain a little further.

Recognising that Frank (1991) does consider the *relationships* between different types of bodily action and particular objects, Maguire (1993) argues that there is a tendency in the questions he asks about the body to be concerned with understanding society from the perspective of a *singular* body. So when Frank's four questions about action are asked by an embodied person "structure is reduced to agency and a subjectivist, non-relational analysis of social structures is provided" (Maguire 1993; 40). Put simply, the questions; how predictable will my performance be? (*the disciplined body*) Am I lacking and/or producing desire? (*the mirroring body*) Am I open or closed to others? (*the dominating body*) Do I associate or dissociate

from myself? (*the communicative body*) all tend to privilege the individual, subjective dimension of embodied human action. Furthermore, and in terms of gendered bodies, the dominating body that Frank (1991) refers to is exclusively male. His argument rests on the idea that dominating, male bodies, characterised by fear and anxiety, and constructed by a fundamental sense of lack, turn to the domination of others. The focus on male bodies deflects attention from examining balances of power between the sexes that, among other things, may enable female bodies to be dominating.

Notwithstanding the legacy of disembodied sociological accounts about sport and society, and recognising the recurrent narrative of neglect of the body in the extant literature, I wish to emphasise that bodies are *back in* in sociology and the sociology of sport. At least over the past two decades, several sociologists have focused on the importance of the body in understanding aspects of physical activity, sport and exercise (see for example Andrews, 1993; Atkinson & Wilson 2002; Cole, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2002; Connell, 1995, 2002; Featherstone, 1991; Gruneau, 1993; Hargreaves, 1987; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Hall, 1996; Klein, 1993, 1995; Maguire, 1991, 1993; Messner, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1990; McDermott, 1996, 2000; Shilling, 1991, 1993; Theberge, 1991; Turner, 1984; 1996; Young & White, 1995). Such scholarship is testimony to the point that the significance of the body is being more thoroughly explored in the sociology of sport.

Since the first publication of Turner's (1984) account of The Body and Society, there has been a growing literature on, what is commonly referred to as 'the sociology of the body'. Literature concerning bodies and sport more specifically has also been prolific during at least the past twenty years. As Frank (1990, p. 131) remarks "bodies are in, in academia and popular culture". In the sociology of sport, and elsewhere, work on the body addresses an array of questions and draws on many different perspectives. There are many ways that social theorists have sought

to make sense of sporting bodies. Some have demonstrated how it might be possible to overcome the classic mind/body dichotomy discussed previously. Maguire (1993, p. 34), for example, considers that the most fruitful explanations embrace perspectives that consider sporting bodies "in the round"; as a synthesis of biological, psychological and socio-cultural dimensions. Elias's work on the emotions (1991) and Bourdieu's (1978, 1984) accounts of sport, bodies and habitus are two examples. It is also worth noting that the apparent neglect of corporeal issues may be reconciled with a critical re-reading of classical and contemporary writings (Cole, 2002; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). In terms of the sociology of gendered sporting bodies, such a task seems to have begun in relation to the work of Elias (Dunning & Sheard, 1973; Dunning, 1986, 1993; Maguire, 1993; Mansfield & Maguire 1998, 1999; Mansfield, 2002; Tseëlon, 1995), Foucault (Cole, 1993; 1998; Markula, 1995; 2003; Rail & Harvey, 1995; Smith-Maguire, 2002; Theberge, 1991;), Goffman (Sassatelli, 2000) and Bourdieu (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Laberge & Sankoff, 1988; Shilling, 1991, 1993).

In contrast to the historical absence of corporeal considerations in sociology and the sociology of the sport, feminist theorists have become increasingly mindful of the relationships between the body and society. The next section introduces the developing feminist literature that emphasises the body as central in the production and reproduction of gender.

3.2 Feminisms and Sporting Bodies

One of the most sustained attempts at conceptualising the body in a sociological sense is to be found in feminist scholarship (Burkitt, 1999; Frank, 1990, 1991; Hall, 1996; Morgan & Scott, 1993). Hall (1996) remarks that bodies have always been central to feminist analyses of gender politics. Feminist scholars have been instrumental in raising consciousness about the variety of ways that both women and men embody gender and sexuality. More specifically, feminist work has

illustrated how bodies are significant in the production and reproduction of gendered social inequality, oppression and dominance (Williams & Bendelow 1998). To paraphrase Frank (1991, p. 42) feminisms have taught us that the answers to questions of gender domination are to be found within and between bodies.

As well as being of central concern in academic feminist writing, bodies have come to the fore as a consequence of the political impact of feminism (Hall, 1996; Turner, 1996; Morgan & Scott, 1993). As a political movement, second-wave feminist thought and action has been at the heart of public and political issues associated with the oppression of women's bodies. The history of women in sport reflects struggles over legitimate uses and displays of female bodies, and cultural resistance to the domination of preferred images of femininity. For example, Victorian women who participated in physical activity challenged traditional ideals of female corporeality by disregarding prevailing medical advice, denying the primacy of their reproductive capacities, and asserting their independence (Hargreaves, 1994; Hall, 1996). It is important to note (as discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 5) that feminist struggles over female bodies in sport, and other cultural practices, have not always taken account of embodied differences between and within groups of women (Brah, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Morgan & Scott, 1993; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Yet, feminists have been instrumental in raising awareness about, and fighting for the rights of (some) women in terms of corporeal issues such as sexual harassment, domestic violence and medical interventions (Hall, 1996). There are several excellent feminist accounts about the exclusion and relative inclusion of women in sporting practices (Delamont & Duffin, 1978; Hargreaves, 1994; McCrone, 1988; Vertinsky, 1992, 1994). Hargreaves (1994, p. 254) and Hall (1996, p. 100) argue that individual sports women have often resisted taking overtly political positions about discrimination. Nevertheless, an increasingly important focus of academic debates

about understanding, challenging and changing gender inequality in sport is linked to contestations over the meanings, uses and control of female and male bodies.

It is evident from the literature that feminist theorising has stimulated diverse investigations and debates about the body. Early feminist work highlighted female bodies as sites of repressive power. Bordo's (1993, p.165) analysis of the reproduction of femininity, for example, claims that the body is "a direct locus of social control". For her, the increasing amounts of time that women spend on body management and corporeal discipline means that female bodies are docile bodies. As Bordo (1993, p. 166) explains, the "exacting and normalizing" regimes of diet, cosmetics, fashion, and exercise reflect the pursuit of slenderness and denial of appetite that characterise traditional ideals of femininity. Such thinking paints a somewhat negative, bleak view of gender relations, yet it was a characteristic opinion of second-wave feminist demands for women's liberation as women struggled to gain control over their bodies. A common point of argument centred on a critique of the way that women's bodies are defined in terms of biology rather than as social beings. On this basis, some earlier feminist scholarship examined the ways in which women's bodies are managed under systems of capitalism and patriarchy (Bartky, 1988, 1990).

In Sandra Bartky's (1990) work, it is emphasised that women are alienated from their bodies in many aspects of cultural expression. When women are visible, the images are often demeaning and inaccurate. For Bartky (1990, p. 39) the key producers and arbiters of femininity are to be found in what she refers to as the "fashion-beauty complex". While she does not provide any analysis of the structure of this complex, her work suggests that such a nexus consists of a system of corporations that produce goods, services, information, images and ideologies associated with the female body-beautiful. Specific disciplinary techniques serve to produce the feminine body. In Bartky's (1988) analysis of modernity and patriarchy

she contends that diet and exercise enforce the tight, slim female body in a culture where female power, strength or physical size are considered distasteful. Exercise for women concentrates on feminising female bodies according to an acceptable shape and size. Regulatory practices for the body, such as exercise, also emphasise the production of feminine movement and posture.

Later work by Bartky (1990) still contends that female bodies are required to be soft, passive, restrained, hesitant, vulnerable and weak and are thus alienated from any potential that they might have as strong and active. For her, then female corporeal discipline is important in terms of constructing a feminine look. Moreover, feminine practices of the body, such as the application of make-up, fashion, skin care and hair styling, are directed to the display of its surface in the sexual objectification of the female physique. On this issue of the sexualisation of female bodies, Bartky (1990) remarks that 'true' femininity is achieved by women who have been lured by the agents of the fashion-beauty complex into being a body not simply for themselves but for others. Her point is that women have lost control over the production of their image to those who are "obedient to imperatives which are both capitalist and phallogentric" (Bartky, 1990, p. 41).

More recent studies of sport and gendered bodies include critical insights into the way that early feminist work tended to reinforce dichotomies such as nature/culture and individual/society (Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994, 2001). The concept of patriarchy has also been questioned in terms of furthering an understanding of gender and gendered bodies (Acker, 1989; Elias, 1986; Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Turner, 1996; Walby, 1989; Waters, 1989). As noted at the end of the previous section, writers concerned with questions of gender, the body, sport and exercise have begun to more readily harness the work of sociologists such as Bourdieu, Elias, Foucault and Goffman as they have taken embodiment as the starting point for understanding gender relations. A range of theoretical insights are

being utilised in addressing a diversity of feminist questions about the body, sport and exercise. I examine some of the literature throughout this review to demonstrate the significance of it in understanding gendered bodies and sporting practices. It is clear from the material about gender, bodies and sport that one of the most significant developments in feminist understandings of sporting bodies has been the appropriation of Michel Foucault's ideas. The next section outlines the contribution of Foucault-informed feminisms in debates about gender, bodies and sport.

3.3 Feminisms, Foucault and Sporting Bodies

Foucault is firmly on the feminist agenda in terms of efforts to further an understanding of gendered bodies. Several scholars in the sociology of sport have advocated the use of his work in understanding how particular discourses about male and female sporting bodies come to prevail (Andrews, 1993; Cole, 1993, 2002; Hargreaves, 1987; Harvey & Sparks, 1991; Theberge, 1991). This is not to say that Foucault himself made any extensive analysis of gender. Scholars in the sociology of sport have noted that Foucault's theorising disregarded the conditions and experiences of women because he ignored gender issues (Andrews, 1993; Theberge, 1991). While Markula (2003) recognises that Foucault did relate his notion of power to women, Gruneau's (1993, p. 101) observation that Foucault's conception of power "has little to do with class or gender or any recognizable social group" is a common perception of writers examining his ideas.

In spite of the fact that his own work did not take adequate account of gender, Ramazanoglu (1997) explains that Foucauldian perspectives can further an understanding of gender, sexuality and power relations. For Diamond and Quinby (1988), the potential of Foucault for feminist investigations of the body rests with his focus on the body as a site of power and domination, and the historical role of discourses in producing and maintaining unequal power relations. Hall (1996, p. 53) explains that the work of Foucault is attractive to feminist understandings of

gendered bodies because the body is conceived of as “an historical and culturally specific entity.” This is not dissimilar to the approach of Bourdieu, Elias and Goffman. Cole’s (1993, 1998) work emphasises that Foucault’s *genealogical* approach provides a framework for understanding modern bodies as discursive self-productions constructed through the historical effects of power relations. Next, I review a selection of feminist literature that has appropriated Foucault’s ideas in understanding gendered sporting bodies.

The previous section highlighted the work of two writers, Bordo (1993) and Bartky (1988, 1990), as examples of feminist literature presenting female bodies as sites of repressive power. Bordo (1993) and Bartky (1988, 1990) maintain that exercise is one disciplinary practice serving to condition female bodies according to narrowly defined ideals of feminine beauty. Both have harnessed Foucauldian perspectives on power in understanding the body and the reproduction of femininity. Foucault’s ideas about the effects of power on *docile* bodies are evident in both the pieces of feminist literature to which I refer. For Bordo (1993), for example, Foucault’s conception of power serves to illustrate that while women may experience their bodies in terms of control and empowerment, regulatory and normalizing practices such as exercise and diet discipline female bodies to be obedient to the cultural requirements of femininity. Similarly, Bartky (1988, 1990) explains exercise, dietary regimes and cosmetics as practices of domination in the social construction of the feminine body-beautiful. Bartky (1988, p. 71) defines disciplinary practices of the female body as “technologies of femininity”. While Bartky (1990, p. 42) recognises women’s own desires and satisfactions in their choice of body management regimes, she explains that such corporeal desires are “false needs” produced through indoctrination in a culture of domination. In claiming that a woman who must apply her make-up before she can leave the house “will never discover the beauty, character, and expressiveness her own face already possesses”, Bartky’s

analysis emphasises female bodies as docile, manufactured and normalised according to idealised femininity (Bartky, 1990, p. 42).

Feminists examining the sociology of sport more specifically have advocated a Foucauldian analytical framework for understanding gendered sporting bodies (Cole, 1993, 1998; Theberge, 1991; Markula, 1995, 2003). Some, such as Bordo (1993), Bartky (1988, 1990) and Lloyd (1996) have recognised the ways in which sporting practices operate as technologies of domination that serve to lock women into a network of normalising practices of the body (Cole, 1993; Carlisle-Duncan, 1994; Markula, 1995, 2001). Others, as Smith-Maguire (2002) also notes, have examined the connection between bodies and power in terms of Foucault's "technologies of the self", which refers to the ways that people are able to construct themselves through bodywork and corporeal knowledge (Chapman, 1997; Markula, 2003; Rail & Harvey, 1995). Here, I wish to present some of different ways that Foucault's ideas have been appropriated in understanding gendered bodies in sport and sport-related contexts.

Carlisle-Duncan (1994) examines how Foucault's idea of panopticism offers a useful way of understanding mechanisms that inculcate unrealistic body ideals in women. Using the metaphor of the panopticon; a specific prison system that constructs prisoners as self-monitoring, Carlisle-Duncan (1994, p. 50) contends that women are exposed to a panoptic gaze that monitors them for potential deviations from "patriarchal ideals of femininity". Internalising such a gaze, and engaging in processes of constant self-surveillance, women are testimony to the effectiveness of the panopticon. By this view, sporting practices are understood as institutions that are characterised by processes of discipline and surveillance (Cole, 1993). Similar conclusions are presented in Moya Lloyd's (1996) study of aerobics and the politics of female bodies. She finds that women who perceive their body to be fat, unfit, and in need of re-sculpting through aerobics have become "self committed to relentless

self-surveillance" (Lloyd, 1996, p. 94). For her, Foucault's phenomenon of the panopticon is at work in the aerobics context.

Carlisle-Duncan (1994) examines the textual discourse of two issues of Shape magazine to provide evidence for the self-conscious body monitoring in women. In terms of mediated images and messages associated with female health, fitness and beauty, the panoptic gaze operates to render women's bodies as docile in two ways (Carlisle-Duncan 1994, p. 51). *First*, women are told that responsibility and potential for achieving a body like the models in glossy magazines rests with their personal commitment ("The Efficacy of Initiative"). *Second*, women are taught that good health is linked to good looks ("Feeling Good Means Looking Good"). Conflating health and looks effectively submerges issues of health in relation to those of beauty. The way in which the twin processes of *Efficacy of Initiative* and *Feeling Good Means Looking Good* operate is through discourses of corporeal shame and confession. Carlisle-Duncan (1994) draws on Foucault's notion that confession is linked to power relations. Her argument resonates with Spitzack's (1990, p. 83) discussion of the "confessional gaze". Confession encourages women to critically examine their corporeal excesses and deficiencies, perpetuates female anxieties about the body, and serves to increase a woman's sense of motivation towards the achievement of the body-beautiful. For Carlisle-Duncan (1994, p. 61), the panoptic mechanisms feature women as individuals but, at the same time, emphasise "public moral imperatives to conform to the feminine ideal". The conflation of public and private serves to deepen and widen obsessive (female) self-monitoring and the pursuit of female body ideals.

Other feminist scholars have utilised Foucault's work in accounts that are more sensitive to the complexities of gender power relations in sporting contexts. Markula (1995), for example, also examines contemporary media ideals surrounding active female bodies with reference to Foucault's ideas about panoptic power. She

does so by exploring the images and meanings of the exercising female that are constructed in the media. In her interviews with women who participated in aerobics she considers how media discourses structure women's ideas about their bodies, and also the ways in which women respond to such ideals. Markula (1995, p. 424) emphasises that media ideals of the female body are contradictory; "firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin". Furthermore, women's relationships with idealised images of femininity are a contradiction. It is Markula's (1995) contention that 'women' find it impossible to achieve the corporeal ideals of shape and size presented to them, and indeed find their struggle to do so "*ridiculous*" (Markula, 1995, p. 424). These antagonistic and contradictory relationships that women have with their bodies are explained in terms of the panoptic power of media discourse on female beauty and health.

Markula's (1995) analysis differs from Carlisle-Duncan's because she contends that there is no single image of femininity. Media portrayals of the female body-beautiful are increasingly diverse. Many images count as ideally feminine. Like Carlisle-Duncan (1994), Markula (1995) identifies that media discourses constitute the panoptic mechanism of "Looking Good Means Feeling Good" (Carlisle-Duncan, 1994, p. 51). Such a mechanism of power emphasises health but subordinates real health issues to the achievement of the body-beautiful. But, in contrast to Carlisle-Duncan (1994), Markula (1995) makes it clear that the bodies of female exercisers are not 'docile'. The women in her study did engage in physical activity aimed at sculpting their bodies according to idealised notions of the female body-beautiful. However, they also actively questioned the body ideals presented to them and were sceptical about the relevance of mediated images of female beauty to their own bodies. For Markula (1995, p. 450), such body awareness demonstrates that these women have not completely internalised the panoptic power arrangement. Furthermore, aerobics does not entirely serve as a vehicle for (female) corporeal

oppression. Body management is only one reason why women participate in aerobics. Markula (1995) has also found that aerobics provides a safe exercise environment for women: it improves women's energy and confidence; it is an opportunity to socialise; and it acts as a time-out from their daily routines. Her analysis of aerobics and female bodies, then, includes an understanding of the complex power relations that surround bodies and corporeal practices. For Cole (2002, p. 440), the use of Foucault's more complex conceptualisation of power in terms of the "normalization of power and the power of normalization" has been significant in advancing knowledge and understanding of sporting bodies. Particular examples of this re-conceptualisation of power can be provided with reference to literature that considers bodily regimes in terms of Foucault's ideas about "technologies of the self".

According to Rail and Harvey (1995) *technologies of the self* are corporeal practices that may be disciplinary, but that provide a foundation for freedom and self-transformation. It has previously been shown that technologies of femininity, in Bartky's (1990) view, are a means of domination rather than a means of personal transformation. Yet, according to Rail and Harvey (1995) technologies of the self can be considered as practices that are enabling as well as constraining. Conceptualised in terms of the potential for resistance and self-transformation, the notion of technologies of the self has been more fully explored by Markula (2003) in her paper on sport, feminism and Foucault.

Markula (2003) examines what Foucault's technologies of the self can offer feminist sociologists in terms of understanding gender, sport and exercise. In a review of literature applying Foucault's concept of technologies of the self to understanding female experiences of sport, she highlights the prevailing emphasis on sport as a technology of domination, and a normalizing practice of femininity. Her argument centres on harnessing Foucault's later work that considers the individual's

potential for challenging and changing practices of domination. Like Rail and Harvey (1995), Markula (2003, p. 104) argues that Foucault's technologies of the self should be read as "practices of freedom". She explains that there is potential for women to construct new experiences of physical activity that transgress dominant discourses of femininity. In order to realise this transformative potential, women must engage in critical evaluation of the "self-aestheticization practices" in which they might be involved (Markula 2003, p.102). So, bodybuilding, dieting, cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, or indeed any corporeal self-aestheticization practice can serve to operate as a transgressive technology of the (female) self when individual women adopt a critical, self-reflective approach about the ways that such practices reinforce the (constraining) norms of femininity. From Markula's (2003) considerations, it is difficult to determine what types and styles of physical activity might constitute the transgression of women's (subordinate) condition that she calls for. However, Theberge's (1995, 2002) analyses of women's ice hockey and the politics of gender do, at least to my mind, provide some insight into the struggles by women to legitimate their sports. In particular she explores ways in which notions of female physicality and toughness are contested in the rules concerning body contact in women's ice hockey. The female players in Theberge's (1995) study did not see why their game should mirror the men's game that emphasised power and force. These women questioned, and were critical of the assumed preference for male / masculine ideals in their sport. The absence of full body contact in women's Ice hockey legitimates the game for the female players precisely because it is different from the men's game. Interviews with players revealed that the team provides them with a context to "collectively affirm their skills, commitment and passion for their sport" (Theberge, 1995, p. 401). For some, the limited body contact resulted in a *better* version of the game. In other words, women's ice hockey can be viewed as a

technology of the self because the practices, rituals and techniques enable some women to develop and express their capacity for self-management.

Like Theberge's (1991) empirical work, Markula's (2003) review and evaluation reflects more recent feminist literature that expands upon Foucault's later and more sophisticated conceptualisation of power. Such scholarship allows for some consideration of the effects of corporeal power / knowledge on the production of the gendered self (Cole, 1993, 1998; Smith-Maguire, 2002). It should also be noted that some work has begun to examine issues of gender, sexuality and identity in light of Foucault's accounts of sex, power and modernity. Following Foucault's ideas about power, for example, Pronger (1990, 1998) points out that bodies are constituted by programmes of sexual power. In his study of homosexual male athletes, he notes that the creation of sexual categories such as heterosexual and homosexual serves to construct people's understanding of acceptable and unacceptable bodies (Pronger, 1990). His point, like that of Caudwell (1999), is that the emphasis on sex and gender differentiation in sport serves to regulate established ideas about sex, gender and desire, and thus upholds established power relations about sexuality. Caudwell's (1999, p. 376) study reveals that women's football (soccer) and women's footballing bodies are sites for the "operation of the compulsory order of woman-feminine-heterosexual".

This section has outlined the contribution of Foucault's writings to some selected studies of sport, gender and the body. Much of the Foucauldian analyses of gendered bodies is connected to questions about power and identities. Issues of gender, power and identities are common themes to have emerged in the wider literature on sport, gender and the body. Some of the literature organised around the corporeal themes of gender, power and sporting bodies is addressed later in the review. The next section explores in more detail the gendered themes of Elias's work that were introduced in chapter 1.

3.4 Elias, Gender and Civilized Bodies

Chapter 1 introduced some of the core themes of a figurational process-sociological approach that might shed light on gender relations in the context of sport and exercise. Here, a more detailed review of some of Elias's work on gender is presented. The particular aspect of Elias's theory of civilizing processes identified in the work reviewed concerns his emphasis on the long-term, very gradual trend towards equalisation of power between the sexes, and the advancing power of women in specific socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, the review in this section illustrates how particular modes of gendered bodily conduct and expression develop in the context of unequal and shifting balances of power between the sexes. Given this, some of the relationships between gender, bodies and civilizing processes are drawn out.

Elias and Scotson (1994) provide some insights into the balance of power between the sexes in their study of a local community. Presented here are some of their observations about the family patterns of one particular neighbourhood, the Village (*zone 1*) that reveal the centrality and relative empowerment of mothers in family life and social activity such as clubs and voluntary groups. The men of the Village were less strongly involved in the mother-focused social activities compared to the women. Such observations highlight an uneven balance of power between the sexes that is tilted towards *some* women. Elias and Scotson (1994, p. 50) explain that there was "an extended mother dominated kinship group" in the neighbourhood of the Village. Such mother-centred family traditions grew up over time and "comprised three or even four generations". Mothers of the Village had relative control and a "preponderant influence" over "spare-time" and "person-person" functions (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 46). The influence of Mum was evident in several ways. For example, the dominant role of the wife's mother was strengthened by her involvement as guardian of her grandchildren. In addition, daughters tended

to take charge of nursing Mum or housekeeping for her, and grandmothers cared for babies when their mothers were at work. In these examples, it is clear that the mother-centred family pattern was interconnected with the needs of working married women. The relative power of mothers and the subordination of other family members to their superior position reflected a dominant social code that underpinned the uneven balance of power between the sexes. Mother-centred extended families were embedded in the old working class Village community and developed across several generations. The centrality of Mum was reinforced and maintained by a mutual respect for such family patterns within families and between members of other families. The accepted superiority of mothers enabled them to manipulate and tighten family bonds. For example, mother-in-law was instrumental in integrating son-in-law into the family, and mobilising family involvement in social activities, home improvements or caring for elderly family members. Indeed, the strength of emotional ties within the mother's family network often prevented married women from leaving the community.

Another example that Elias (1986, p. 287) uses to illustrate the uneven balance of power between the sexes is his observation of an elderly Indian gentleman and his wife. The couple would speak to each in an animated manner but they did not look at each other. The wife, who wore traditional Indian dress would walk behind the husband by two or three steps. The husband spoke without turning his head to his wife, who responded, often avidly, without raising her eyes. This is one example of an "uneven balance of power between the sexes represented by an inescapable social code" (Elias, 1986, p. 288). It illustrates that the restraint exerted by social custom had become a habit, an aspect of the social habitus of individuals or as Elias (1986, p. 288) suggests, "second nature". The woman and man, raised according to the Indian tradition could not break with the custom without losing respect both from each other and those brought up in the same way. Illustrating the

relational nature of power, Elias points out that, in particular family relationships, some women may have gained relatively high individual positions of command. In the wider society in which the above example is set, however, men hold greater power resources than women. The dominant social code constructs women as subordinate and inferior compared to men.

What was striking for Elias (1986) was how the traditional code of conduct between women and men of the European upper and middle classes differed in relation to other, say American Indian, Chinese or Brahmin societies. His attention was drawn to the distinct ambiguity of the European code. In some respects the balance of power favoured men. For example, he points out that up to the middle of the nineteenth century, married women, in most European countries were afforded no rights to own property. More usually, sexual relations of unmarried men were accepted and those of unmarried females were considered taboo and harshly condemned. There were also more lenient laws regarding male than female adultery (Mennell, 1992). Yet, at the same time, the balance of power between the sexes shifted in favour of women. As Elias (1986) illustrates, there was, in Europe, a notable absence of public demonstrations of the social inferiority of women compared to men and the public display of women as men's property. His evidence seems to call into question Veblen's (1899) more "satirical and polemical" work on conspicuous consumption (Marshall, 1998, p. 365). For Veblen, one consequence of industrial capitalism, in the USA, was the construction of women as conspicuous displays of male wealth. Yet, Elias's (1986) observations about 19th century European life, indicate the existence of stringent rules demanding that, in public at least, men should be deferential to women by, for example, opening doors for them and being seated after women at the table. In some countries, a "full lifting of the hat" together with "a deep salutation" reflected the correct greeting ritual of a gentleman when he met a lady he was acquainted with on the street (Elias, 1986, p. 289). The

kissing of a lady's hand was also part of the greeting ceremony when a gentleman visited or left a lady's house and once again when meeting her in public. The European code of conduct demanded that men should publicly treat women as socially superior.

In terms of explaining the ambiguity of the European code of conduct Elias (1986) brought into question the term patriarchy as a concept for understanding the balance of power between the sexes. Debates surrounding the conceptualisation of patriarchy are also of concern to feminist researchers (Acker, 1989; Kemp & Squires, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994; Waters, 1989; Walby, 1989). Elias (1986, p. 315) suggests that *andrarchic*, meaning men-dominated, is a more accurate term for use in analysis of relationships between the sexes than *patriarchal*, meaning "men in their capacity as fathers". His reasoning for this was that men's domination is not necessarily synonymous with 'rule by fathers'. Similarly, *gynarchic*, meaning women-dominated, is a preferable term to *matriarchal*, meaning "women in their capacity as mothers" (Elias, 1986, p. 315). Women's domination does not always equate with 'rule by mothers'. Furthermore, his concept of power balances or power ratios enables sociologists to perceive the power differentials between groups of women and men as "shades and grades" rather than in terms of static polarities (Elias, 1986, p. 289). Thus, the deeply shaded andrarchic European code of conduct embodied some lighter gynarchic tones. Elias's evidence is of several spurts and simultaneous or subsequent counter spurts towards a reduction of the inequalities between the sexes (Elias, 1986, p. 290).

In terms of providing examples of the changing balance of power between the sexes, Elias refers to the early Roman Empire and the shift towards a more equal power ratio between husband and wife in married life. One early Roman custom was a marriage by purchase (in Latin, *coemptio*). Unmarried women were objects, often taken by force, in exchange for something. Married women

experienced extreme social subjugation in the context of the husband-wife relationship. Their social inferiority was connected to their relative physical weakness compared to men. As the Roman Empire expanded in wealth and influence, however, there was a distinct change in the relations between the sexes. In terms of the hugely wealthy aristocratic strata of Roman society, the private institution of marriage for both daughters and sons increasingly represented a rivalry for power and status. In earlier Roman times, the husband bought his wife. Later, a dowry was paid to the husband by the "wealthy aristocratic oligarchy" (Elias, 1986, p. 292). Gradually, some women of the upper classes were able to exercise control over such things as property. This became possible under new marriage contracts in which the control of women was not handed over to their husbands. With the development of the Roman State, court intervention was utilised as a means of reducing women's disadvantage in cases of divorce (Mennell, 1992).

Elias's discussion serves to demonstrate that the social subordination of women in the development of Rome was not solely or simply connected to their physical weakness in comparison to men. It was the growth of the Roman state apparatus that was influential in the changing balance of power between the sexes. State government of internal pacification, judgement of conflict and fights for survival between groups were significant in the spurt towards a relatively equal balance of power between husband and wife in the elite strata of the Roman Empire. The very gradual trend towards more equal relations between the sexes was characterised by many fluctuations. Relatively empowered women of the upper Roman classes still led a confined life, were protected by their male relatives and were excluded from military service and public office. Women were not given a personal name, rather they assumed a female variant of their father's clan. For example, in the house of *Claudians* all daughters were *Claudia*. Other forms of female disadvantage characterised the very long process of female emancipation in specific spheres of

Roman life. For example, a woman did not have the right to divorce her husband, and drinking wine, along with adultery was a reason for a husband to divorce his wife. The key point that Elias identifies in this regard is that changes in the balance of power between the sexes were not constructed by planned State legislation, even though the development of the Roman State and its structure, as a society, were intimately related to the power ratios between men and women. It was gradual changes of custom, reflecting wider changes in society at large that initially constructed the shift.

In the new order of the Roman Empire a degree of tolerance towards the extra-marital affairs of young married women and the development of love-relationships illustrates a degree of emancipation for women. Women were also becoming distinct social groups with their own social networks. These types of social relationships were more frequently evident centuries later in European court societies and provide evidence of early forms of female emancipation (Elias, 1983). As Elias (1983) points out, women, considered as social groups, had greater power at court than in any other formation in French society at this time. In explaining the sociogenesis and development of French court society as functions of power shifts in society at large, Elias (1983, p. 194) notes that "Society under Louis XIV was already a court society characterised by the importance of women". The diminishing knightly function, for men, meant that women were becoming less socially subjugated.

The development of love-relationships at court reflected a new range of emotions and heightened sensitivity. Courtly love found expression in, for example, the increasing acceptance of poetry and song (*Minnesang*). Elias's (1983, 2000) observations on *Minnesang* and courtly forms of conduct illustrate a specific expression of the changing relations between men and women with reference to higher and lower status people in court society. He articulates the dynamics of sex, gender and class relations in a specific social sphere. This aspect of his work casts

doubt on Hargreaves's (1992) assertion that Elias is silent on the interdependence of gender and class. As part of the developing court etiquette, the employment of a *Minnesänger* pointed to the advancing power of women in the elite strata of French society from the twelfth century. Elias explains that the riches and wealth of the feudal lords in the twelfth century afforded them most power in their regions. For this reason, the great feudal courts had greater cultural significance than the towns (Elias, 2000, p. 244). In the competition between feudal lords, the struggle for prestige, power and wealth rested on the acquisition of administrative and bibliographical scribes, poets and minstrels to write and sing the praises of the lord and lady of the court. Poets and minstrels (*Minnesänger*) were instruments of power in the struggle for prestige amongst feudal lords. Women played a significant role in the formation of this type of court culture (Elias, 1983, 2000). It was particularly in relation to the status and presence of the lady of the court that the richest and, hence, highest-ranking lords attracted the highest quality and most refined jesters, *Minnesängers* and troubadours. Through the encouragement of the lady, *Minnesängers* became increasingly refined and sensitive in their expressions and carnival in their performance. Themes of deferred love and devotion to the noble lady demonstrated the part played by the relationship between *Minnesänger* and the lady of the court in the very partial, but nonetheless perceptible advancement in emotional and behavioural control at court. Self-restraint in court society was reflected in behaviour and emotion that served to 'distance' the sexes (Elias, 1983). For example, the female custom of disguising the face by a mask or fan reflected the relative power of women in the development of romantic behaviour and affect. In the relative confinement of the court circle, noble ladies were instrumental in the very gradual trend towards more peaceful forms of conduct.

As in the case of Ancient Rome, Elias (1983, 2000) emphasises that the trend towards equalisation of power between the sexes and the advancing power of

women in European court societies was by no means a linear process. There were many shifts and spurts. The European code was marked by ambiguity. For example, the heightened sensitivity and new range of emotional expression reflected in *Minnesänger* at court should not lead one to over-exaggerate the pacification of feudal societies. *Minnesang* was in direct conflict with the dominant knightly mentality. There was a distinct difference between the more sensitive attitudes and feelings expressed in *Minnesang* and the brutal, knightly ones of *chansons de geste*. Once again, Elias (2000) articulates the interdependence of class and gender in this example. He points out that the differences in attitude and emotion between *Minnesang* and *chansons de geste* derive from “two different kinds of relation between man and woman, corresponding to two different classes in feudal society (Elias, 2000, p. 247). Lower ranking knights of smaller courts were relatively brutal and disrespectful towards their wives and women of lower rank. In the few higher-ranking feudal courts, lords expressed a more courteous attitude to women.

That said, being a *Minnesänger* represented a prestigious ‘occupation’ for knights without land who placed themselves in the service of greater ones. Singing and composing for great and rich noble lords and ladies presented opportunities for those who had been driven from their land whether from the upper or lower strata of feudal lords. A *Minnesänger’s* service was marked by relative dependence on very wealthy social life and by the advancing power of the noble lady. In the restricted circles of the court, “a more peaceable life formed about the lady” (Elias, 2000, p. 247). *Minnesängers’* addressed the lady in expressing a desire to serve the court. In terms of the relationship between the lady and the *Minnesänger*, it was the lady who had relatively more power over the serving man.

The brief review in this section has sought to demonstrate that Elias's work provides evidence of some first forms of emancipation for specific groups of women. His work, for example, illustrates that the feudal courts of the twelfth century

presented women with “special opportunities to overcome male dominance and attain equal status with men” (Elias, 2000, p. 248). Some women in France also owned property and engaged in politics at this time. Such social transformations, which also favoured *Minnesang*, represented a degree of liberation for women in the elite strata of French society. Still, in the narrow sphere of the feudal courts, the superiority of the man, based on his physical capacity, wealth and status was more or less clear. Once again, these examples demonstrate that the uneven and slowly changing balance of power between the sexes is one of the central tenets of Elias's work on civilizing processes. As will be seen, such ideas have been useful in informing this research. To further illustrate the relevance of Elias's work to studies of gender, the following section reviews some figurational work that has shed light on issues of gender and sport specifically.

3.5 Gendered Sporting Bodies: Figurational/ Process-Sociological Approaches

A concern for gender relations has been one of the central issues of some figurational work on sport since the 1970s (Dunning, 1999). Birrell (1988) highlights the relatively unnoticed importance of Sheard and Dunning's (1973) work to feminist scholarship. Dunning and Sheard (1973) focus on males, masculinity and the game of Rugby. Nevertheless, their study is concerned with gender. The cultural practices developed in the rugby football subculture are characterised by the exclusion and degradation of women. In particular the lyrics and actions of drinking songs reflect the vilification of females. Common rituals include defilement of the genitals and the male striptease which represents a mocking of the female stripper. Such practices are viewed by Sheard and Dunning (1973) as a symbolic way of boosting male egos that have become threatened and deflated by the growing power of women in society at large, as well as in sport. In other words, some men need the space provided by the rugby football club to display male superiority and maintain attitudes that reflect and reinforce female inferiority. Such a male preserve represents a space for the

production and reproduction of an ideology of male dominance and female subordination.

Dunning et al. (1988) present a gendered figurational approach to the study of football hooliganism. Tracing the long-term existence and development of football hooliganism, Dunning and his colleagues explain the propensity of hooligans for physical violence and explore the relationships of hooligans with women. English football hooligans come from all classes but according to Dunning et al. (1988), the overwhelming majority are drawn from rougher sections of the working class. The Leicester group found that the lives of English football hooligans were characterised by a relatively low degree of formal education, manual employment, relative poverty, mother-centred families and high levels of sex/gender and age-group segregation (Dunning, 2002, p. 229). It is these characteristics that interweave to produce and reproduce masculine aggression in everyday life as well as in the context of hooligan behaviour.

Dunning et al. (1988) explain that the young working class men who form hooligan groups, bond with each other (segmental bonding) and often, although not exclusively, seek fighting opportunities with men who are similar to them. Such hooligans tend to perceive fighting as positive. Fighting provides these men with meaning, gratification and status. The aggression they display in fighting gangs is reinforced in the rough working-class communities they live in as well as within their families. Some women in these communities develop a positive evaluation of aggressive men and come to accept aggression as masculine. In common with the cultural practices of some men in the rugby football club (Sheard & Dunning, 1973), Dunning et al. (1988) conclude that the language of hooligans and the lyrics of their songs and chants embody a form of aggressive sexism and homophobia. Hooligan behaviour symbolically vilifies, degrades and objectifies females and gay men.

Maguire (1986) draws on the work of Elias in discussing the relationship between images of manliness and ways of living in British society in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Demonstrations of aggression and violence were a feature of life in the eighteenth century and found expression in recreational pursuits. Folk football, for example, was a disorderly, riotous affair marked by physical fighting. Such recreational pursuits reflected an aggressive image of masculinity. However, this was not the only salient code of manly conduct. By the end of the first half of the nineteenth century manly expressions of physical violence had waned. A gradual development of less brutal and bloodthirsty forms of conduct was interwoven with a long-term social transformation associated with a social need for more chivalrous behaviour (Elias, 1998). For Elias, (1998b, p. 75), such behavioural change can be explained in terms of the development of the concepts of courtesy, "civilité" and civilization from the sixteenth century. Later, processes of industrialization and urbanization, as well as state-formation led to temporal and spatial restrictions on the unruly activities of popular culture. In addition, a shift in the balance of power towards the middle classes contributed to the withdrawal of paternalistic support for popular recreations by the aristocracy and gentry. Increasing control by the State over the legitimate use of force tended to tighten the limits of public order. At the same time, Methodist and political reformers were making direct attempts to tame the behaviours of society in general, and the working classes in particular.

Maguire (1986) argues that social transformations towards more peaceable forms of life and a concomitant increase in people's propensity for engaging in and observing violent acts impacted upon both the development of a more 'civilized' game of football (soccer) and more restrained forms of manliness. In terms of soccer, advocates adhered to manliness of a more temperate kind than those of Rugby, a game in which traditional images of manliness emphasised physical prowess and courage. Thus, there was evidence that no one common code of

masculinity existed. Maguire (1986) argues that competing images of manliness were evident in the context of both recreational activities and forms of street life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Being a man was connected with differing codes of conduct that varied across the social spectrum. According to Maguire (1986, p. 272) "the gradual emergence within the upper and middle classes of values demanding stricter control of aggression, produced distinctive attitudes to the types of physical violence and manliness deemed permissible". Such differential codes of conduct were "the source and the consequence of social tension between and within classes" (Maguire, 1986, p. 265). Reflecting the work of Elias, Maguire (1986) argues that those seeking to control popular culture succeeded in securing only relatively more 'civilized' versions of manliness than had previously been acceptable. Aggressive manly mores still found expression in forms of football (soccer) participation and spectating across the classes. Even though processes of modernisation characterised football during the nineteenth century, it remained, to some extent, a disorderly and rowdy activity that was "relatively 'uncivilized'" (Maguire, 1986, p. 269).

In a survey of Physical Education (PE) teachers, Waddington et al. (1998) examine teachers' involvement in, and attitudes towards the teaching of PE. Their research reflects the underpinning assumptions of a figurational approach to the study of gender and physical education. This analysis of gender stereotyping and PE considers the views of both male and female teachers and issues about femininity and masculinity in relational terms. Waddington et al. (1998) found, for example, evidence of similar patterns of involvement in, and attitudes towards the teaching of games, gymnastics, athletics and swimming in the male and female teachers in their study. There were, however, marked differences between women and men in relation to the teaching of dance and outdoor activities. Men were less likely to teach dance and felt less competent to teach the activity. They tended not to enjoy

teaching dance and felt that it was not an important aspect of the curriculum. Women were less likely to teach outdoor activities. They more commonly indicated that they did not feel competent to teach outdoor education and they tended to report that they did not enjoy teaching it. In addition, the women in the study tended to consider that outdoor education should not be included in the curriculum. On the basis of their evidence, Waddington et al. (1998) conclude that the teaching of PE tends to reproduce gender stereotypes. Not only do the authors examine gender inequalities, they consider ways of challenging and changing such gender dynamics in PE. Drawing on Flintoff's (1993) and Scraton's (1993) work, they conclude that redressing unequal gender relations in PE will necessitate reforms within educational establishments as well as within the wider social, economic and political environment.

More recent work by Dunning and Maguire (1996), Dunning (1999) and Maguire (1999) also reflects the view that figurational contributions to the sociological study of sport have not neglected gender issues. Broadly speaking, the authors apply Elias's theory of "civilizing processes" to problems of gender. Dunning and Maguire (1996) assert that Elias's work has potential in advancing our knowledge about male and female identities and habituses in the context of changing balances of power between the sexes. Understanding the changing balance of power between the sexes is considered in terms of the character and overall structure of the society in which particular women and men live. This approach has helped to shed light on sport as a 'masculinity-validating' experience and a haven from the growing power of women, as well as furthering an understanding of male opposition to women's participation in sport. Some selected examples of Dunning and Maguire's (1996), Dunning's (1999), and Maguire's (1999) figurational / process sociological approach to gender relations and violence are discussed below.

According to Elias's theory, there has been a gradual increase in external sanctions regarding violence (Dunning & Maguire, 1996). In terms of gender relations there is evidence of an accumulation of social controls relating to violence by men against women. Simultaneously, there has been a shift from external control of violence to internalized self-restraint so that at the level of habitus, there has been a lowering of people's propensity to witness and conduct violent acts. This does not necessarily mean that there are less acts of violence by men against women, although that might be the case. Rather, aggressive behaviour tends to be more private or pushed behind the scenes. In terms of the changing balance of power between the sexes, the internalisation of self-restraint is characterised by, among other factors, a heightened sense of morality about male violence towards women and stronger public reaction when such acts of violence are perpetrated (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 307).

For Dunning and Maguire (1996), shifts from external to internal constraints of violent urges and affect have resulted in males being deprived of a public right to use violence and, correlatively, a commonly held belief that it is wrong for males to be physically aggressive towards females. To some extent such processes will have led to the relative empowerment of females in relation to males. At the same time, men tend to feel their masculinity threatened. Dunning and Maguire (1996) argue that sport, the military and the police are socially sanctioned enclaves for the expression of masculine aggression, physical prowess and power and for the development of more traditional masculine identities and habituses. Such social contexts are legitimate spheres against "feminisation" and "emasculisation" (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 308). Having said that, Elias's approach helps us to understand that the status of sport as a bastion of masculinity is not *totally* secured. The growing power of some women can enable them to challenge and change the andrarchal organisation and ideologies of sport.

Dunning and Maguire (1996) fruitfully use Elias's approach to explore problems of sport and femininity. They highlight that sportswomen remain relatively marginal when compared to sportsmen in terms of media representation, financial rewards and participation rates. While women are becoming involved in sports in increasing numbers there are still barriers to their participation. Some sportswomen have their sexuality questioned by others and see their own sense of femininity as compromised via the sports experience. Yet, there has been a very gradual growth of equality between the sexes in the context of relatively advanced (western) urban-industrial-nation-states. Such a trend does not reflect a uni-linear process. There have been many fluctuations in the balance of power between the sexes. Long-term developments in society at large, such as modern forms of birth control, reduction in family size, the invention of the tampon and labour saving household devices have enabled more women to participate in a wider range of sports. Improvements in female self-confidence, assertiveness and independence and a desire for equality between the sexes have also motivated women in sport. In short, one of the underpinning arguments in Dunning and Maguire's work (1996) is that evidence of increasing opportunities and participation rates for women in sport reflect the relative empowerment of women in wider social contexts.

Maguire (1999) also emphasises the importance of examining gender relations in terms of the character and overall structure of societies. He explains that to understand the continuities and changes that pattern gender relations it is important to study gender on a global level. Discussing gender, sport and globalisation processes Maguire (1999a, 1999b) sketches out the position of women and men in the development of global achievement sport. He identifies a series of long-term processes that form the integral features of global sport, and that reflect prevailing established outsider-relations and gender power geometries within particular societies. For example, the emergence of modern sport in the eighteenth

and nineteenth century British context reflected and reinforced dominant images of manliness at the time. Men from the elite strata of society were central in the reconstruction of emerging body cultures associated with athleticism, the games cult and Muscular Christianity. While, as Maguire (1999) notes, the evidence that sport developed as a male preserve might reflect our limited knowledge about the history of women's sport, the ideals, content and significance of modern sport were predominantly shaped by elite, white, Anglo-European men.

Maguire (1999) argues further that from the late eighteenth century, established sporting images of Western, able-bodied, class-based masculinity were being dispersed around the globe through processes of globalisation. Yet, he emphasises that the globalisation of sport is characterised by more complex gender relations than a claim to a uni-dimensional domination of white, European men might suggest. Harnessing Elias's ideas Maguire, (2004, p. 367) argues that the global development of sport is marked by "a series of power struggles, elimination combats and a mutual contest of sameness, difference and commingling". There is evidence in sport of alternative expressions of gender that run counter to dominant, male determined sport forms and body cultures. For example, challenges and changes to conceptions of sexuality are reflected in practices such as the Gay Games. There is evidence also of the relative empowerment of elite sportswomen as increasing numbers of them are able to ply their trades around the globe in such sports as tennis and golf (Maguire, 2002). In addition, the widening acceptance and significance of disabled sport, represents, in part, broadening definitions of acceptable male and female sporting bodies.

To further illustrate the relevance of Elias's work to studies of gender, this section has examined some of the work of figurational sociologists that has contributed to an understanding of gender and sport. Such work provides further evidence that Elias's ideas are relevant to studies of gender. It is also noteworthy

that, more recently, some scholars in mainstream sociology have begun to explore the potential of Elias's work in understanding gender, bodies, subjectivities and identities (Burkitt, 1991, 1999; Entwistle, 2000; Featherstone et al., 1991; Lupton, 1996, 1997; Shilling, 1993; Tseëlon, 1995; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). Tseëlon (1995), for example, uses the theory of the civilizing process in explaining the relationship between men's increasing drive and affect control, and long-term developments in female modesty. Entwistle (2000) also considers that civilizing processes help to explain the importance of fashion and the body in marking out status and distinction. Having reviewed some of Elias's work on gender, and that of other figurational / process-sociologists on gender and sporting bodies, the next section explores further the literature organised around the corporeal themes of gender, power and sporting bodies.

3.6 Gender, Power and Sporting Bodies.

It has already been highlighted in previous sections that some feminist work views sport and exercise as vehicles of oppression for women. The reason for this is linked to the idea that the main purpose of activities such as exercising, dieting and cosmetics is to alter female bodies according to idealised and male-orientated images of femininity. It was also demonstrated that some feminists using a Foucauldian perspective have sought to incorporate a more complex conceptualisation of power that includes ideas about the "self-productive self", critical-ethical practice and the transgressive potential of human activity (Cole, 1998, p. 268). There is other literature, not solely driven by Foucault's ideas, that has advanced an understanding of sporting bodies by considering their role in the constitution of gender power relations (Connell, 1995, 2002; Gilroy, 1989; Hargreaves, 1987; Hargreaves, 1986; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Mansfield & Maguire 1999). It is to this literature that I now turn.

In discussions with, and about female bodybuilders, Miller and Penz (1991) focus on recovering the positive meanings and associations between women, their bodies and physical activity. They highlight that cultural contestations over power are always struggles about *meaning*. Their work analyses the efforts of female bodybuilders to colonize the male preserve of bodybuilding by re-negotiating and redefining its dominant masculine meanings. The female body builders in Miller and Penz's (1991) study were able to colonize the male preserve of bodybuilding in two ways. First, they established ownership of the practices, rituals and techniques of bodybuilding. These women claimed their female right to participate by harnessing its suppressed female meanings as a "sport of appearance" (Miller and Penz, 1991, p. 150). For Miller and Penz (1991) a focus on the feminine 'posing' aspect of bodybuilding served to destabilise its established masculine meaning. Second, the women in Miller and Penz's (1991) study were able to feminize the sport by using their culturally derived skills in the management of appearance (bodywork) in non-traditional ways. The female bodybuilders in Miller and Penz's (1991) study claimed bodybuilding as women's bodywork. The body builders in Miller and Penz's (1991) study emphasised that bodybuilding could only be 'properly' understood and practised by women because only women have the expertise to make it a sport of appearance as well as one of muscle building. Traditional feminine ideals associated with nutrition, health, patience and modesty were also claimed to be necessary for 'genuine' participation. Furthermore, the masculine focus on developing sheer strength and size was considered to undermine men's ability to engage in the sport as it is meant to be.

There are similarities in this line of argument with Theberge's (1995, 2002) findings about the experiences of women ice hockey players. For example, the prohibition of body checking in women's ice hockey is thought by some to redefine the women's game as one of speed, strategy and skill, rather than in terms of

(masculine) power and force. It seems then that there is some potential for female body builders and ice hockey players to effectively challenge the male preserve of sport. For Miller and Penz (1991) female bodybuilders were actively involved in “undoing the connection between the sport and the features of masculinity that allegedly favoured them” (Miller & Penz 1991, p. 60). On this basis bodybuilding is explained as a contradictory and complex practice in terms of gender. It simultaneously complies with and opposes established gender relations.

Other scholars have examined the contradictory nature of female bodybuilding (Bolin, 1992a, 1992b; Guthrie & Castelnuovo, 1992; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996; Obel, 1996; Tate, 1999). Some others have also investigated male bodybuilding in terms of the ambiguities and contradictions that characterise the production and reproduction of gender (see for example White & Gillett, 1994; Klein, 1990, 1993; Monaghan, 2000) St. Martin and Gavey’s (1996) account contends that women’s bodybuilding resists established disciplines of femininity through the cultivation of muscle. However, at the same time, female body builders who compete, submit to traditional feminine ideals. Differential rules and judging criteria for women reinforce dominant ideas about what it is to be feminine. In competitive events, female bodybuilders cannot be ‘too bulky’. Judging criteria for women incorporate the notion that the size of their muscles must be balanced with displays of feminine deportment, shape and attitude. To stay within the bounds of femininity, competitive women bodybuilders wear extensive make-up, dye their hair blonde and sometimes undergo surgery for breast augmentation (Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Obel, 1996; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996).

For Guthrie and Castelnuovo (1992), bodybuilding competitions, with their emphasis on conventional femininity, make it unlikely that bodybuilding can be a site of feminist resistance. Balsamo (1994, p. 350) also concludes that traditional gender hierarchies persist in female bodybuilding that serve to limit any potential for

disrupting ideals of femininity. Despite displaying highly muscled bodies that can be interpreted as “feminist resistance”, the rules of competition make female bodybuilding a site of “femininity’s recuperation” (St. Martin & Gavey, 1996, p. 54). St. Martin and Gavey (1996) conclude that female bodybuilding involves contradictory practices that challenge and disrupt ideas about what counts as feminine (and masculine).

The ambiguities associated with femininity and bodybuilding are central to the work of Bolin (1992a, 1992b). She contends that female bodybuilders do engage in practices that comply with the competitive judging requirements of femininity. On the public stage, they use strategies of femininity as a means of winning competitions. But in the more private sphere of the training gym, Bolin (1992a, 1992b) illustrates that female bodybuilders are not concerned with appearing feminine. In hard-core bodybuilding gyms, women are involved in the serious business of building muscle, do not wear skimpy posing clothing and are not concerned with presenting a feminine appearance. Bolin (1992b) concludes that the experience of bodybuilding is a transformative one for some women. The presentation of a feminine appearance is simply a strategy for winning competitions.

This section has illustrated the ways that some scholars have understood sporting bodies by examining their role in the production and reproduction of gender power relations. One of the arguments to emerge from the literature concerns sport and exercise as a site for the construction and reconstruction of gendered identities and habitus. The next section discusses some of this literature.

3.7 Sporting Bodies, Gender, Identities and Habitus

A common theme in the sociology of the body concerns the body as a social practice and the idea of the body as a bearer of social meaning (Benson, 1997; Gatens, 1992; Turner, 1996). Shilling (1993), for example, explains that the body is part of a self-project through which individuals express their personal emotions.

Conceptualisations of the body as a metaphor for gendered social relations have become increasingly prominent in sociology and the sociology of sport (Gatens, 1992, 1996). Shilling (1991) contends that the body is central in understanding the multiple ways in which gender identities are produced and reproduced. This view is increasingly reflected in the sociology of sport literature. Here I review some of the literature that makes connections between sport, corporeal appearance and deportment, and the construction and reconstruction of gendered identities and habitus.

Obel (1996) discusses concepts of gender, sexuality and the body in the context of female bodybuilding. Following her line of argument, gender identification and “identity work” in bodybuilding are characterised by ambiguity (Obel, 1996, p. 85). The emphasis on developing muscularity produces images of female and male bodies that potentially cross boundaries between the established understanding of both femininity and masculinity. Obel (1996) recognises, for example, that the muscular female bodybuilder can be seen to transgress the boundaries of what counts as feminine. Yet, she contends that female bodybuilders actively resist being interpreted as a threat to received understandings of femininity. They engage in practices that confirm and express an “aesthetic (feminine) appearance” (Obel, 1996, p. 192). As noted in other literature and introduced in the previous section, rules of competitive female bodybuilding concerning the cultivation and display of feminine muscular shape and size encourage femininity specific bodywork that also includes breast implants, hair dyeing and make-up. Obel (1996) also explains that concerns about the tensions between muscularity and femininity contribute to the view that male bodybuilding is the ‘norm’ as opposed to female bodybuilding where perceptions of the abnormal physique of the muscled female are more common. However, on closer inspection there seems to be ambiguity in terms of the sexual identity of male bodybuilders. Practices, techniques and rituals performed by these

men can be identified as feminine. For Obel (1996) the required focus on appearance enhancement and competitive posing involves the development of skills that are feminine and therefore the masculinity of male bodybuilders is challenged. Bodybuilding is then a site for contestation of gendered identities.

Tate (1999) considers that women who work-out by weight training, regardless of their involvement in competitive bodybuilding, are active in negating traditional models of femininity by cultivating their bodies to their own design. Explaining that the women in her study make their bodies their "signature", Tate (1999, p. 33) argues that weight training is a body project that enables them to construct a personal sense of feminine self that transgresses established ideals of female beauty. According to Tate (1999) women who engage in weight training for muscular gain manage any stigma and negative physical capital associated with muscularity by identifying muscles as erotic, desirable and above all feminine. Furthermore, they identify with other women who have cultivated the muscled look that they desire. This self-defined sense of femininity is not only characterised by an outer muscled physique. The women in Tate's (1999) study identify with an 'outer' female body that is strong and powerful. They have also developed an 'inner' sense of corporeal strength that is expressed in their bodily deportment. These women consider female strength and confidence to be a natural part of being feminine. Given this, Tate (1999) concludes that through weight training for muscular gain, the women in her study are active in constructing new feminine identities that challenge and transgress a dominant feminine habitus.

In her discussion of feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality, Iris Young (1990) considers the habitual actions that construct a contemporary Western embodiment of femininity. Her observations about general bodily movement, and more specific actions in physical activities reveal that in comparison to boys, girls are less inclined to make full use of the body's "spatial and lateral potentialities" (Young,

1990, p. 145). Boys and men tend to use all the space available to them when sitting, standing and walking. They use their bodies boldly in physical activity. There is a tendency for girls, at least in contemporary Western societies, to have a feminine body habitus that is characterised by hesitant, incomplete body movements and a tentative approach to physical activity. Furthermore girls tend to perceive themselves as relatively weak, and as having limited physical capability. Young (1990, p. 147) then, is claiming that there is "general feminine style of body comportment and movement"; a female body habitus. Scholars in the sociology of sport have also argued that sport and exercise are sites for the construction of acceptable femininity. In other words, it has been claimed that women's sporting participation is restricted through their clothing, acceptable use of the female body and the need to appear heterosexually attractive (Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton, 1992; Lenskyj, 1994).

Young (1990) is also mindful that the restricted corporeal experience she describes does not apply universally to all women all of the time. Such restricted physicality may also apply to some men. Indeed, some authors writing about sport and masculinity highlight that the sports experience may be frustrating, stressful and disappointing for boys and men (Connell, 1995; Klein, 1993; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Nevertheless, in referring to the modalities of femininity, Young (1990, pp. 143-144) is expressly making reference to "a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical *situation* of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves". Although underdeveloped in her 1990 essay, Young's (1990, p. 154) ideas incorporate the possibility that girls, or women can escape the female body habitus either by chance, or, more often, through an awareness of some means of overcoming the restrictions of such femininity. Such an idea is central to some work in the sociology of sport (see for example Bolin, 1992a, 1992b; Chapman, 1997; Miller & Penz, 1991; McDermott, 2000; Young & White, 1995). For McDermott (2000, p. 331), it is through physical

activity, that some women are able to develop alternative ways of understanding their bodies.

Young's (1990) argument resonates with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus since she contends that habitual actions create feminine and masculine dispositions that contribute to a sense of feminine and masculine identity. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, though, Bourdieu's ideas have been developed in light of Elias's conceptualisation of identification, and the relationship between identity and habitus. Elias's ideas about habitus have been harnessed in some work on gender in sport. Dunning and Maguire (1986), and Dunning (1999) for example, apply his theory of civilizing processes to problems of gender relations, gender identities and gender habituses in sport. Emphasising a concern with gender / body / sport relations, these authors examine some of the ways that gendered modes of thought, conduct and emotion have become embodied at the level of habitus. For them, sport is a site for the "embodiment" and "expression" of multiple identities founded on aspects of, for example, gender, class, ethnic and national groupings (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 304). Focusing on gendered dimensions of identity and habitus, it is argued that sport is a principal forum for the formation and inculcation of masculinities. However, as a consequence of civilizing processes, there has been a very gradual shift in the balance of power between the sexes towards women that is reflected in the growing involvement of women in sport, and the increasing significance of sport and exercise to females (Dunning, 1999; Dunning & Maguire, 1996)

For Harvey and Sparks (1991, p. 171) Bourdieu's notion of "body *habitus*" is particularly significant in understanding the politics of the body. Shilling (1991, 1993) and Laberge and Sankoff (1988) also use Bourdieu's concept of habitus in considerations of sport, exercise and gendered bodies. Their work is considered below.

Laberge and Sankoff (1988) follow the work of Bourdieu in their discussions with women about participation in physical activities, lifestyle choices and perceptions of the body. They examine the fundamental relationship between class habitus (conditions of existence that produce lifestyle choices), and body habitus (the characteristic relation to one's own body) in order to understand the specific character of participation in physical activities. For Laberge and Sankoff (1988), middle class females participate in physical activity more frequently than working class, intellectual bourgeoisie or upper class women. The desire of middle class women to engage in physical pursuits is connected to their need to conform to established ideals of feminine appearance. Such a need is connected to these women's position in the labour market where great value is placed on physical appearance. By comparison, intellectual bourgeoisie women disliked activity involving intense physical exertion. Rather, they expressed a taste for leisure activities associated with physical awareness, harmony with the body and the accumulation of cultural knowledge (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988, pp. 281-282). Such physical activities included gardening, photography, painting, singing and visiting museums. Women of the intellectual bourgeoisie engage in such pursuits because they are novel, and indeed to discredit those activities favoured by middle class females.

The working class women in Laberge and Sankoff's (1988) study also illustrated a relative lack of participation in physical activity. However, the women in this group perceived that there was little benefit from participating in sport and leisure practices. Rather, the immediate effects of cosmetics were preferred as a means for changing one's outward appearance. Upper class women demonstrated more diversity in their physical activities than any other class of women in Laberge and Sankoff's (1988) analysis. The way in which upper class women act in terms of physical activity, that is their body habitus, is connected to the value of the activity in

terms of social and cultural capital. Overall, it appears that participation in physical activity varies between women of different social classes. Such variation is based upon available 'leisure' time, financial resources, and perception of the immediate and long-term "profits" of their involvement (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988, p. 285). Perceptions and appreciations of the benefits of physical activity, and thus the nature of the (female) body habitus, are founded on the class habitus

Some of Shilling's (1991, 1993) work specifically explores the ways in which Bourdieu's (1978) ideas about physical capital provide a theoretical framework for understanding the production of gendered social relationships. In Shilling's (1991, p. 654) account of Bourdieu's ideas, physical capital develops through the relationships between "social location, the 'habitus' and taste". In order to examine the relationships between physical capital and gender, Shilling (1991) draws on the work of several scholars that can shed light on the gendered reproduction of habitus (an internalised set of dispositions providing people with class dependent ways of being) and taste (the processes involved in the lifestyle choices that a person makes).

Several *causes* of gendered differences in physical capital are highlighted in Shilling's (1991) interpretation of naturalistic and post-structuralist accounts of gendered bodies. The naturalistic approach, for example, emphasises that women are restricted in terms of movement and spatiality, and alienated from their physicalities, usually by patriarchal forces (see for example, Chernin, 1981; Woolf, 1991). Post-structuralist orientations illustrate *discourses* surrounding beauty, diet and exercise *construct* gendered orientations to the body and physical activity, and thus, gendered habitus and taste (see for example Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1990; Turner, 1996). Yet, such conceptualisations reflect the tendency for post-structuralist reifications of discourses. For Shilling (1991, p. 664), "*dialectical*" approaches to the body are more fruitful in shedding light on the processual relationships between physical capital and gender. The focus on the body in the

writings of Elias (1983, 1991, 2000) and Elias and Dunning (1986), for example, is advocated by Shilling (1991, 1993) as a way of understanding that the reproduction of gendered bodies is never unchallenged or static. The work of Elias is also harnessed in developing a sociological model of sport and the emotions (Maguire, 1992; Maguire et al., 2002). Such scholarship also emphasises that bodies are part and parcel of the social relationships through which they are constructed. Furthermore, the significance of the body in the production of social inequalities is marked by historical and cross-cultural characteristics. Participation in sporting activities makes the body susceptible to change. Jarvie and Maguire (1994) discuss this issue in their own examination of Bourdieu and the study of sport and leisure. They recognise that sport and physical education can be "ideologically laden" and significant in the production of class, gender and national habitus and identities (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 189). Yet, like Bourdieu (1978), it is emphasised that the making of bodies in sport and leisure is a contested terrain (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 189). Through sport and exercise practices, men and women, girls and boys, may resist having their bodies constructed in ways deemed appropriate.

A central feature of McDermott's (2000) discussions with active women is a consideration of the physically and socially empowering effects of participation in sport and exercise, at the level of identity. Building on an earlier critique of the concept of physicality (see McDermott, 1996) she explores women's perceptions of their bodies in wilderness canoe-tripping and aerobics to illustrate how such sporting activities can be empowering. McDermott (2000) explains that there is a tendency, at least for women whose formative experiences of their bodies are founded on appearance-related concerns, for female bodily perception and usage to be embedded in established ideals of femininity. Aerobics was considered to be a site for the reproduction of such gendered (feminine) physicality, more so than

wilderness canoeing. However, both aerobics and canoeing experiences were also significant in broadening some women's understandings of their physicality.

Participating in aerobics, for example, contributed to the development of physical confidence and corporeal literacy (knowledge and understanding of bodily capabilities). Aerobicists expressed feelings of confidence about their physical strength, endurance, fitness and competence. Furthermore, some of them were able to discover physical abilities that had never emerged before. Canoeing contributed to the construction of alternative understandings of female physicality. Some of the women in McDermott's (2000) study illustrated that their experiences of wilderness canoe-tripping enabled them to use their bodies and feel embodied in new ways. More specifically, overcoming the physical challenge presented by the intensity of their canoeing activities, some of these women experienced physical success for the first time in their lives and came away from the experience feeling physically empowered. McDermott (2000) emphasises here that a woman's sense of physicality is a process. Her work illustrates that involvement in sport and exercise can serve to broaden women's understanding of their bodies, and contribute to alternative images of female corporeality. Women's experiences of physical activity, their understandings of physicality, and the development of a female body habitus then are not necessarily locked into contemporary (commercial) ideals of femininity.

This section has reviewed some literature that explores sport and exercise as a site for the production and reproduction of gendered identities. For some authors, the construction of the gendered self is connected to the relationship between sport and consumer culture (Hargreaves, 1987; Featherstone, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1996). The next section overviews some the literature concerned with the body, gender and the emphasis on 'the self' in contemporary consumer culture.

3.8 Bodies, Exercise and Consumer Culture

Part of the argument in the work of Turner (1996) and Shilling (1993) concerns the centrality of the self in consumer culture. This contemporary emphasis on selfhood means that the body is regarded as malleable and can be shaped according to a person's needs and desires. The project of the self, then, is the project of the body (Shilling, 1993). More recent (Western) sociological interest and understanding of the body and self-identity are connected to long-term transformations in the economic, technological and political configurations in society; transformations that have contributed to the emergence of consumer culture (Cole, 1993, 2002; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1996). The emphasis in such arguments centres on the idea that historical and culturally specific processes impact on the way in which bodies are perceived in academic spheres and popular culture.

In her review of body studies in the sociology of sport, Cole (2002, p. 438) draws attention to this "historical specificity of bodily appearance". She notes, for example, that contemporary self-consciousness about the body, and the significance of the body in production, reproduction and perception of the self, is connected to changing medical technology and current crises of health. Pioneering developments in genetic engineering and reproductive technologies, as well as the growing threat of "killer diseases" such as AIDS, have contributed to the intensification of anxieties surrounding the body (Turner, 1996, p. 5). Such social transformations also underpin an increasingly diverse (identity) politics of the body in both popular and contemporary academic literature (Burkitt, 1999; Cole, 2002; Turner, 1992, 1996; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). One area in which corporeal issues surrounding the construction of self-identity are increasingly significant is in the sociology of sport. According to Turner (1996) the reason for this is connected to the emphasis on sport, fitness and leisure in late capitalism. The commercialisation of the body can be linked to the shift from industrial capitalism towards a "postindustrial culture" founded

on a global economy, service industries, advertising and consumerism (Turner, 1996, p. 3). A focus on the body-beautiful, denial of the ageing / diseased body, and the value of physical fitness and health reflects the increasing consumerist concern with the body (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Maguire, 1999)

Featherstone (1991) examines further the significance of the body in consumer culture. Following his line of argument, the commercialisation of exercise, diet and cosmetic fitness practices illustrates the emphasis on bodily appearance and corporeal preservation in late capitalism. Such "self-preservationist" conceptions of corporeality are linked to the idea that the body represents a sphere of hedonistic practices, desire and pleasure (Featherstone, 1991, p.170). Within consumer culture, the media emphasise that the reward for 'body-work', such as diet, exercise, and cosmetic regimes is an improved 'look', a more marketable self, the increased potential for self-expression and the experience of pleasure. Specifically, body imagery in consumer culture is associated with the themes of beauty, youth, energy, enjoyment, freedom, luxury and romance. There is a moral value placed on the achievement of such themes and the promise of these pleasures requires a sharpened awareness of one's own and others' appearance. The tendency, then, in contemporary Western life, is for people to perceive that their bodies should be worked-on, and worked-out as a means of representing and expressing the individual self.

Shilling (1993) recognises that, increasingly, bodies are perceived as open to construction and reconstruction, and that one's sense of self identity is understood in terms of one's body. In consumer culture, the body is recognised as a project in a different way than was the case with bodies in more traditional societies. Shilling (1993) argues that not only do people take a more reflexive approach to the appearance, shape and size of the body, but such self-reflexivity is bound up with idealised body images, corporeal display, and the embodiment and expression of an

individual's self-identity. One of the most prominent examples of the body as a contemporary project is found in the proliferation of body maintenance regimes such as (some) sporting practices, exercise, dietary control, therapeutic activities, cosmetics and cosmetic surgery. Associated with such regimes are an array of corporeal products and services encouraging individual responsibility for health and good looks. For example, books, guides, supplements, foods, diets, medical experts, nutritionists and exercise professionals serve to facilitate the care and maintenance of the body in a consumer culture. Body maintenance is associated with an ethos of looking good and feeling good. In this sense, fitness and health are conflated, and individuals are encouraged to adopt a self-conscious, calculating approach to monitoring and maintaining both the internal efficiency and external appeal of their bodies (Featherstone, 1991; Lupton, 1996, 1997; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1996).

In terms of gender, images of the body in consumer culture can serve to perpetuate existing inequalities by motivating people to work-out towards the model look. Paraphrasing Shilling, (1993, p. 5) body management regimes vary along social lines, and particularly in the case of gender. In contemporary (Western) societies, there seems to be a tendency for women to engage in practices that might construct the slender, toned and petite ideals of femininity, whereas men seem to be more preoccupied with a lean, muscular physique. The media are saturated with images of beautiful, slim, muscularly toned female bodies, and messages that encourage and inspire women to achieve such bodily ideals. Yet, as Hargreaves (1987) points out, images of the body in sport do not exactly match those circulating in consumer culture. For example, contemporary images of the sporting female body-beautiful incorporate muscle as feminine. Such an image is in contrast to the skeletal, thin image presented by aspects of the fashion industry. It appears that the articulation of sport and consumer culture is significant in the production of a variety of images of gender. It is also a factor in the production and reproduction of class,

age, race / ethnic, (dis) ability and national relations and identities (Hargreaves, 1987; Maguire, 1999).

3.9 Concluding Remarks

In terms of sociological studies of sport (and other contexts of study), the bio-political agenda has been influenced by long-running debates about feminisms (Hargreaves, 1994, 2002; Bordo, 1993; Cole, 1993), socio-economic change and the growth of consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991; Harvey & Sparkes, 1991; Turner, 1996), changes in the demographic structures of society (Turner, 1996), and a contemporary focus on individualisation and self-expression (Shilling, 1993; Lupton, 1996, 1997). There has been no scope here to explore all aspects of these corporeal themes in detail.

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the sociology of sport as a key area in which the body has been 'brought back into' sociological debate (Frank, 1990). The chapter has illustrated some of the ways that feminist scholars have argued for the centrality of the body in understanding gender, sport and exercise. The chapter highlighted how post-structuralist feminists have appropriated Foucault's ideas in critical accounts of sport and the socio-cultural construction of gender. It was demonstrated that Foucault enables an analysis of the connections between sport, power, the body, knowledgeability, subjectivity and self-management. Literature concerned with Foucault and questions of sport and gender reflects his work on technologies of domination and technologies of the self. As technologies of domination, sport and exercise practices can operate to constrain our gendered choices. Simultaneously, such practices can be read as technologies of the self. In which there is an opportunity for critical / ethical self-reflection, the development of knowledge about oneself, and hence are sites for the negotiation of gender and sexual identities.

Some of the ways in which Elias has addressed issues connected with gender/body relations is presented in this chapter. The idea that there has been a very gradual equalisation of power between the sexes, and a trend towards female empowerment in specific socio-cultural contexts is illustrated. The relationship between gender, bodies and civilizing processes is highlighted by presenting some of Elias's evidence for the development of particular modes of gendered bodily conduct and expression, in the context of unequal and shifting balances of power between the sexes. The chapter illustrates how the theory of civilizing processes has been applied to problems of sporting bodies and gender. It shows how figurational / process-sociological approaches have been utilised to examine gender relations, gendered identities, and gender habituses in the context of sport and exercise. It was shown that Elias's ideas have been fruitfully utilised to examine several themes including: sport as a site for the formation, expression and inculcation of masculinities; the relative empowerment of females in the male-preserve of sport; the formation and reformation of beliefs and values concerning what counts as masculine and feminine conduct, appearance and emotional expression; male opposition to female participation in sport; and, the meaning / significance of sport and exercise for increasing numbers of women.

Examining some of the wider literature concerned with bodies, gender and power, it was illustrated that sporting bodies are central to the constitution of gender power relations. Furthermore, a review of some other literature highlighted that bodies in sport and exercise are sites for the production and reproduction of feminine (and masculine) identities and habitus. Recognising the contemporary emphasis on selfhood, the final part of this chapter reviewed some of the literature concentrating on the centrality of the embodied self in consumer culture. It was emphasised that in contemporary consumer culture, the production and reproduction of the self is a corporeal project. Such literature explains that the importance of the body-beautiful,

and the values of physical fitness and health reflect an increasing consumerist concern with the body.

The literature included in this review illustrates that a range of theoretical insights are being utilised in addressing feminist questions about bodies, sport and exercise. Such scholarship has informed the analysis in this thesis. However, one of the principal tasks of my discussions has been to demonstrate the significance of Elias's work in understanding gendered bodies in the fitness gym. In Chapter 1, I presented an overview of the contribution of several figurational sociologists in addressing questions about gender and sport. Also included in Chapter 1, and in this chapter, was an exploration of the way Elias himself examined gendered issues. The analysis of the production and reproduction of gender in the fitness gym is presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Next, however, the methods and methodological basis for my thesis are explained.

Chapter 4

Method and Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the research strategy, processes and techniques that have framed the study of the female body-beautiful and the fitness gym. It explains, and presents a justification for the specific ethnographic methods and techniques that have been used to generate knowledge about fitness gyms, exercise and female bodies. In order to put this investigation into a methodological context, and to explain the appropriateness of an ethnographic approach, the chapter begins with an overview of the nature and characteristics of qualitative research. Reference to the historical debates surrounding qualitative and quantitative research paradigms is made and selected epistemological and ontological concerns are given consideration. Next, the chapter discusses the processes that characterised the design and conduct of the research strategy. More specifically, I include a critical discussion about how feminist and figural thinking have enabled me to produce relatively adequate knowledge about sporting bodies and gender relations. Finally, the chapter focuses on the ethnographic methods that were employed throughout the investigation. In this regard, sections are included that explain how and why the techniques of participant observation and interviewing were used to understand female bodies in the fitness gym.

4.1 The Field of Qualitative Research: Definitions and Developments

A review of the literature concerning research methodology reveals a variety of explanations about qualitative research. Since the methods of qualitative inquiry are diverse, it seems impossible for researchers to agree on a single definition. One common feature of the multiple definitions that prevail, is an emphasis that qualitative methods are those that do not employ quantitative means of *analysis* (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Burns, 2000; Hammersley, 1989). On this basis,

qualitative inquiry refers to “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.17). Yet, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicate, such a vague explanation does not capture the field of qualitative research in the most meaningful way. Qualitative research cuts across the human disciplines. Techniques that require the research subject to express opinions and feelings are normally, but not exclusively associated with the social sciences, and they may be used in the physical sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). For example, in laboratory tests on the physiological performance of human beings Borg (1998) has recognised the human subject as a psychosomatic and social whole. His perceived exertion and pain scales were developed as a method of measuring “subjective somatic symptoms” such as perceived exertion, effort, breathlessness, fatigue and pain (Borg, 1998, p. v). Furthermore, qualitative data may be quantified with the use of statistical techniques that are often considered to be the preserve of quantitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Illustrating that a range of methodologies and methods have been used in the socio-economic analysis of sport, Chantelat (1999) explains that extreme economic (quantitative) approaches such as micro-economic analyses have been used to understand the relationships between the economy, sport and society. In addition, qualitative interpretation based upon the theories of Marx, Bourdieu and Elias has also provided a perspective on the socio-economics of sport practices.

Given that qualitative research means different things to different researchers, what needs to be grasped in terms of a definition is the idea that as a “field of inquiry in its own right”, qualitative research refers to a complex set of concepts and assumptions associated with several methodological perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 2). More recent work concerning research methods has shifted from descriptions of techniques for acquiring information, such as participant observation, interviewing, content analysis, conversational analysis and ethnography,

to discussions of methodology; “the theory and analysis of how research should proceed” (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 2000, p. 162). While the historical developments in qualitative research are complex, and a single explanation evades practitioners, some generic characteristics like the ones offered by Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 3) can provide a framework for understanding the field. Following Denzin and Lincoln (1998), qualitative research is naturalistic in its endeavours to make sense of social life. The qualitative methods that researchers employ as they seek to advance their knowledge of the social world are many and varied and may include one or a combination of techniques such as case study, personal experience, life story, interviews, participant observation, archival documentation and media texts. The key to understanding the qualitative field is to think of qualitative research as a set of practices underpinned by competing views regarding the nature and characteristics of methods, findings and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 6).

Over the past two decades, the focus on methodological debates in qualitative research has occurred at the same time as the growth and acceptability of such inquiry has increased. More recent emphasis on the use of qualitative methods reflects a resurgence of the importance of qualitative research for studying human behaviour that was already established in the 1920s and 1930s through the ‘Chicago school’ tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Hammersley, 1989). Since then, the historical advancements in qualitative research have been characterised by several waves of epistemological debate. Generally speaking, epistemological questions are concerned with the production of knowledge. More specifically, qualitative researchers have engaged with epistemological questions about where knowledge comes from and the confidence they can have about the accuracy and authenticity of such knowledge (Andermahr et al., 2000, p. 76). Some of these issues are discussed in detail in the next section. Here, the historical development of qualitative

inquiry is briefly mapped out in order to provide a broad framework for understanding the way in which this research was conducted.

Literature examining the history, aims, techniques and relative merits of qualitative research is commonplace (Cresswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997; Shipman, 1997). In the initial phases of this research study on female bodies and the fitness gym, Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) provided an aid to understanding the nature and characteristics of qualitative research in the 20th century. They did so by defining several historical moments and explaining the various epistemological debates that underpin such phases of development. As Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (1999) point out, the moments model is well known and in a very preliminary way, the approach enabled me to begin to put into methodological context, the feminist figurational theoretical framework within which the research was being carried out. A more detailed account of the methodological concerns of feminisms and figurational sociology will be provided later in the chapter. Next, I summarise Denzin and Lincoln's (1998, 2000) approach and outline its significance to this research.

In the *traditional moment* (1900-1950) qualitative researchers aspired to provide objective, valid and reliable accounts associated with the positivist (natural science) paradigm. The *modernist or golden age* (1950-1970) was characterised by attempts to construct formal qualitative methods as rigorous as quantitative methods. Distinct qualitative procedures reflected the emergence of post-positivist arguments that centred on a critique of the appropriateness of empiricist methods for addressing questions about human beings in the social sciences. A period of *blurred genres* (1970-1986) saw post-positivist, naturalistic and constructionist arguments gain in credibility. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) explain that it was in the moment of blurred genres that the qualitative research project was conceived. During this

period qualitative researchers employed a diverse range of methods and strategies and began to utilise writing styles that had previously been considered inferior.

The fourth moment emerged from the phase of blurred genres and reflected a *crisis of representation* (1986-1990) where practitioners struggled to locate themselves as researchers and authors in their interpretations of the social world. Such a crisis was also characterised by concerns about how to adequately or authentically describe and explain social reality. In this historical moment there was considerable reflection and reassessment of the underpinning philosophies of qualitative research. Problems of objectivity, validity and reliability came to the fore once again (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). At the same time, there was a critique of “the paradigmatic style” in which ideas were represented (Sparkes, 2002, p. 4). At issue then was the way in which researchers explain, describe and index their findings. Twinned with the crisis of representation was the *crisis of legitimation* that also emerged in this fourth moment and was characterised by concerns about the ways in which qualitative studies were to be evaluated. For Sparkes (2002, p. 5) a third crisis also occurred for qualitative researchers in the fourth phase of development. The *crisis of praxis* raised questions about how it is possible to influence change in social life if society is always a text.

Beginning in the early 1990s a fifth moment of development is defined as the *postmodern moment*. In response to the “dual crisis” of representation and legitimation researchers were increasingly concerned with “participatory and activist-orientated research” as a means of bringing forth new knowledge about the diversity of human existence (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 22). The rejection of grand narratives in favour of local, small-scale interpretations became characteristic of qualitative research in the 1990s. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) propose that qualitative researchers are now facing two further phases of development that they define as the *postexperimental moment* and the *future moment*. Following Sparkes’s (2002, p.

6) review of Denzin and Lincoln (2000), contemporary qualitative research is characterised by concerns about the nature and place of the “other” (the research subject) and the relationship between the research and the research subject, as well as critical reflections about “narrative form and authority”.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) provide a useful map for understanding the nature and characteristics of feminist research. For example, the moment of *blurred genres* represents a significant take-off period in terms of the use of feminist theoretical and methodological analysis. At a time when qualitative researchers were seeking to make sense of ‘local’ situations, feminists were encouraging research that allowed women a voice and were arguing for the legitimisation of women’s experiences in the advancement of knowledge about gender. At the same time, feminist research was characterised by a political commitment to transform gender inequality (Brunskell, 1998; Scraton & Flintoff, 1992). Brunskell (1998, p. 39) points out that, from the 1970s, one consequence of a heightened awareness of masculine dominance in the social world and social research was the development of “feminist methodology”.

Arguments concerning feminist epistemologies came to the fore in the period characterised by *a crisis of representation and legitimation* and the *crisis of praxis*. To paraphrase Ribbens and Edwards (1998, p.4), feminist researchers are qualitative researchers who reflexively examine the gendered nature of social life and as such, they must continually confront questions about the nature and assumptions of the knowledge that is being produced, and who that knowledge is being produced for. The epistemological questions most recently asked within feminist research cut across Denzin and Lincoln’s (1998, 2000) fifth, sixth and seventh moments. In terms of the initial development of the research questions and strategy in this project, I was, for example, mindful of maximising the ‘voice’ of women, situating the researcher in the research account and being sensitive to the

way that power differences between the researcher and research subject impact on the production of knowledge about gender (Scraton & Flintoff, 1992; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Stanley & Wise, 1983).

The usefulness of the moments approach has been recognised. Yet, as this research project took shape and progressed, the limits of such an approach became marked. By their own admission, Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) note that their historical moments are somewhat arbitrary. Each phase should not be thought of as separate, rather they overlap and continue to operate “either as a legacy or as a set of practices that researchers still follow or argue against” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.22). Arguably, for example, qualitative research cannot now be considered from a positivist perspective since the process of inquiry is constructed and reconstructed in relation to a network of subjectivities including gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, class, religion and (dis) ability. Reflecting further on their approach Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000) point out that there are many and varied research strategies and techniques within the field of qualitative inquiry. Differing qualitative approaches and methods provide a foundation for more complex debate about ways of seeing, interpreting, discussing and writing about social relationships than the historical moments approach seems to offer. As will be shown, this ethnographic account of female bodies in the fitness gym is underpinned by a set of methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions that are both feminist and figurational.

Some other authors have expressed concerns about the limits of Denzin and Lincoln's (1998, 2000) model (Atkinson et al., 1999; Coffey, 1999; Sparkes, 2002). Sparkes (2002) questions the applicability of the moments approach to the study of sport. It appears that qualitative research on sport and physical activity has developed at different rates compared with the historical time line proposed by Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000). For example, Sparkes (2002) claims that, in the sociology of sport, during the moment of blurred genres, debates about qualitative

inquiry were only just beginning. Sparkes (2002) also challenges Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) claim that the postexperimental moment is upon us whereby fictional ethnographies, auto-ethnography, narratives of the self, and multimedia texts are considered authentic and acceptable. There is still a great deal of scepticism and debate about the legitimacy of fiction and stories as a way of advancing our funds of knowledge in the sociology of sport and exercise (Denison & Rinehart, 2000; Richardson, 1997; Sparkes, 2000, 2002). In terms of ethnographic research, Atkinson et al. (1999, p. 464) argue that the neatly packaged periods of development proposed in the moments approach tends to "gloss over the historical persistence of tension and differences".

Denzin and Lincoln (1988, 2000) present a useful discussion about the epistemological tensions and debates within qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, the moments approach encapsulates a sense of process in terms of the development of a *sociology* of the sociology of knowledge. Drawing on the model of historical moments it is possible to explore, in more detail, the complexities surrounding questions about how we come to 'know' about the social world and the assumptions that are made about the existence of human beings in the world. These are methodological questions about epistemology (knowledge) and ontology (reality) to which I now turn.

4.2 Methodological Issues and Concerns in Research

According to several authors, the methodology of any research study is concerned with a philosophical analysis of the methods used and consideration of the theoretical, conceptual and investigative dimensions of knowledge (Brunskell, 1998; Deutscher, 1973; Stanley, 1990; Reichardt & Cook, 1979). Much of this discussion centres on epistemological issues and there seem to be "interminable disputes among rival epistemologies" focusing on the question of how we know what we know and the degree of certainty we can have about that knowledge (Marshall, 1998, p. 198). Questions about methodology are also critically concerned with what

is actually out there in the world that researchers seek to understand (Shipman, 1997). The examination of reality itself is ontology.

As noted in the previous section, the history of qualitative inquiry is characterised by methodological debate. Several authors included reference to some of the pioneers of social research, such as Comte, Durkheim, Weber and Marx, who, it is claimed, all sought to demonstrate that they had adopted a particular ontological perspective that would contribute to the production of knowledge about social life (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997; Hughes, Martin & Sharrock, 1995; Shipman, 1997). According to Elias (1978, p. 36) Comte recognised that the "*the science of society was a new kind of science*". The main aim of this new science was "the detection of law-like regularities in social development" (Elias, 1978, p. 37). A claim for 'science' in the investigation of human beings is often referred to as a positivist perspective which is the terms invented by Comte (Bryman, 1988; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). The belief in the achievement of a science of society underpinned sociological thinking during at least the first half of the 20th century. Indeed, some of the most used research methods in the social sciences such as the survey, the questionnaire and statistical models embrace the philosophy of positivism.

A positivist approach claims that the social science endeavour mirrors that of the natural sciences and shares the same epistemological beliefs. In terms of a theory of knowledge, 'science' can be defined with reference to the use of precise and certain methods and empirical observation as the basis for the testing and development of theoretical laws. The positivist view holds that certain knowledge (truth) can only be derived from empirical evidence. The associated assumption is that reality is represented by an external world that is wholly measurable and quantifiable. For major thinkers and proponents of positivism such as Comte, the aim of philosophy was to articulate the possibility of a unified approach to scientific knowledge (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). The use of a positivist (quantitative)

approach in the social sciences provided an authoritative foundation in the first half of the 20th century. However, positivism has weakened through sustained attack since the 1960s (Bryman, 1988; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997).

At the core of the challenge against positivism is the claim that the 'scientific' method cannot be used to obtain adequate knowledge of the social world. Such argument laid the foundations for an *interpretive* alternative to the methods of natural science as a way of knowing about the social and cultural. Since as far back as the late 19th century qualitative techniques for acquiring interpretive understandings of human action have been developing. Indeed in one way, qualitative research can be viewed as a critique of positivist methodology. Since this research project uses ethnographic methods that are qualitative, interpretive and naturalistic the next section addresses the methodological distinctions between the positivist (quantitative) approach to research and that of the interpretive (qualitative) paradigm.

4.3 The Challenge of Qualitative Method: 'The Quantitative / Qualitative' Debate

There has been a tendency in discussions about research methods to treat quantitative and qualitative research as "mutually antagonistic" (Bryman, 1988, p. 93). Methodological issues underpin the historical divide between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. A detailed exposition of the 'paradigms debate' is beyond the scope of this chapter. There are several in-depth accounts of the debate about the nature and relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research in the literature (Bryman, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997; Seale, 1998; Sparkes, 1992; Hammersley, 1989,1998). Here I wish to highlight selected significant differences and similarities between the quantitative and qualitative traditions since a central methodological concern in sociology and the sociology of sport has been an evaluation of the distinction between the research paradigms.

There are several different quantitative methods but all embrace the logic and methods of the natural science model that is underpinned by a positivist philosophy.

Quantitative research then is concerned with objective measurement, causal relationships between concepts, prediction, control and repeatability, and establishing that the results of experimentations can be generalised beyond particular investigations (Bryman, 1988; Burns, 2000; Sparkes, 1992). Quantitative research is not exclusively used in the natural sciences. In sociology for example, the social survey has been commonly used for data collection and adopts the features of a quantitative approach (Bryman, 1988; Hughes and Sharrock, 1997). The objective, systematic quantification of concepts underpins the content analysis of media texts in sociological investigations (Maguire & Poulton, 1999; Neuendorf, 2002). As a critical reaction to positivist (quantitative) traditions, interpretive (qualitative) research is viewed as more appropriate for studying social relations. Having said that, it should be recognised that even within the field of qualitative inquiry there are competing views about how best to advance our knowledge about social relations, as well as alternative perspectives on how social relations are to be understood (Elias, 1978; Maguire & Pearton, 1986; Stanley, 1990).

It has already been highlighted that qualitative research is defined variously and includes many different techniques. However, the qualitative field can be located within the interpretive paradigm. The defining feature of interpretive approaches is the centrality of human meaning in social relationships (Denzin, 1989; Sparkes, 1992). For Deutscher (1973, p. 330) interpreting social reality is a matter of grasping the relationship between what people say and what they do by seeing the world as others see it. Put simply, Denzin (1989, p.10) proposes the key question driving the interpretive project is "How do men and women live and give meaning to their lives and capture these meanings in written, narrative and oral forms?"

Qualitative researchers hold a belief in "real" subjects who are "present" in the world (Denzin, 1989, p. 14). Qualitative interpretive sociology is concerned with describing and analysing patterns of social relationships from the point of view of

those 'real' subjects being investigated. The focus of qualitative researchers is on depicting the reality of social life in dynamic and processual rather than static, fixed terms. Such a view reflects five interrelated and underpinning intellectual aspects of interpretive approaches; phenomenology, *verstehen*, symbolic interactionism, naturalism and ethogenics (Bryman, 1988; Deutscher, 1973).

Interpretive approaches recognise and evaluate the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge, as well as reflecting upon the ways in which their own biographies and identities influence the research process (Denzin, 1989; Maguire & Young, 2002; Sparkes, 1992; Scraton and Flintoff, 1992). For Maguire and Young (2002, p. 15) researchers should begin the "process and craft of enquiry" with an understanding of their own position relative to the subject matter. For example, in discussions of the concept of 'voice' in feminist research, it is argued that feminist scholars have been consistent in their examination of whether and how people are enabled to speak, as well as exploring the ways that research techniques and theoretical perspectives can affect how researchers listen to people's voices (Ribbens & Edwards's, 1998, p. 17). For Fonow and Cook (1991, p. 2) this type of "reflexivity" is a key characteristic of a feminist approach to research. This idea takes into account the 'value-laden' nature of qualitative inquiry and acknowledges that some bias is present in the research process. More specifically, it raises once again questions about objectivity, neutrality or value-freedom in research. A discussion about the role of values in sociology was presented in Chapter 1. Prior to re-emphasising some of the methodological issues surrounding involvement and detachment the next section introduces the exact nature of the problem in this research project.

4.4 The Research Problem

The main aim of this research project was to explain the social dynamics of a fitness gym in the South-East of England and to explore how bodies are central to

the construction and reconstruction of gendered social inequality, and the formation of gendered identities. In doing so, the intention was to examine the experiences of a community of women who 'worked-out' in the fitness gym. The central purpose of the project aimed to make sense of what can arguably be viewed as the contemporary obsession with fitness gyms, working-out and body appearance.

Images presented in the media, and by personnel in the fitness industry, sport and exercise sciences and diet technologies are saturated with images of slim, muscularly toned female bodies and this research was concerned with examining such body ideals. Understanding how female and male exercisers perceived and reacted to such ideals was central to achieving this aim. Specifically, the research problem focused on explaining the apparently female preoccupation with exercise practices aimed at sculpting a small, slender and tight physique.

The theoretical and methodological approach to the research draws on both feminist and figural (process) sociology. The methodological concerns of the research are explored in this chapter. The theoretical framework is discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. It is hoped that the findings of this research might advance the argument for feminist-figural perspectives on gender, sport and society. Furthermore, there is potential for this work to add to existing literature on female bodies, sport and exercise. The next section examines how I have attempted to produce the knowledge that might fulfil such a potential by outlining selected methodological, epistemological and ontological concerns of this research study.

4.5 A Feminist-Figural Approach: Epistemological / Ontological Concerns

This section illustrates that there is a link between theory and methodology in this research project. The connection between theory and method is emphasised by Elias (1978, p. 57) who states that "the development of people's conception of subject matter" cannot be separated from "their conception of the method appropriate to its investigation". On this basis, it is recognised that the way I have

come to know about bodies, gender and the fitness gym, and the limits to the knowledge produced in this research are characterised by theoretical thinking *and* methodological concerns relating to feminist and figural (process) sociology.

On reflection, the theoretical and methodological approach in this research project has influenced the research questions, the choice of methods for collecting evidence and the manner in which the findings have been interpreted. To clarify these influences, four key themes associated with feminist research, 'doing' figural (process) sociology and ethnography are discussed in the sections that follow. *First*, I highlight that the research questions about female bodies and the fitness gym detailed above have arisen out of my own biography and social life. Further reflection about the nature of such influences is included throughout the sections that explain the ethnographic research strategy used in this project. *Second*, a critical evaluation of claims to feminist methodology and feminist epistemology is offered. *Third*, and as a way of resolving some of the difficulties arising from feminist approaches, the methodology of involvement and detachment that was introduced in Chapter 1 is re-examined. In coming to terms with the processes of involvement and detachment, some sensitising concepts associated with 'doing' figural (process) sociology are considered. These relate to the adequacy of evidence, the use of developmental thinking, the personal pronoun model and the interplay between evidence and theoretical analysis (Dunning, 1992; Maguire & Pearton, 1986; Maguire, 1988; Maguire & Young, 2002). As will be shown, these sensitising concepts have been used in developing a rationale for the research project, conducting the research and interpreting the evidence collected. Thus, *fourth*, and in light of the third set of issues, consideration is given to the nature and characteristics of the ethnographic research strategy for studying gender, female bodies and the fitness gym. Details of the way in which the techniques of participant observation and interviewing were employed are provided. Critical

consideration is given to the processes of interpretation and writing up. Finally, the ethical issues surrounding this research project are outlined.

4.6 Being Involved in the Fitness Gym: History, Biography and Social Life

Researchers are embedded within the cultural systems of any given social group. The consequence of such involvement, according to Ward (1997) is that the production of knowledge will bear the mark of the interpreter's social perspective. Berger's (1972) comments are also relevant on this issue. For him: "the way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe" (Berger, 1972, p. 8). To re-emphasise, this is what Elias means when he explains that social researchers cannot escape their social ideologies, or be detached in any absolute sense (Elias, 1978; Dunning, 1992; Maguire & Young, 2002; Murphy et al., 2002).

My own research is grounded in my reality as a white, western, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, sports woman. Several aspects of my biography have influenced the rationale for wishing to understand the production and reproduction of gender, in relation to femininity in the fitness gym. A lifetime involvement in, and love of sport and exercise formed part of the basis for wanting to understand the experiences of women who 'worked-out'. I had always performed relatively well in competitive sports and played junior and senior netball, a predominantly female sport, at a reasonably high level. My desire to improve my performance led to an involvement in fitness activities such as running and weight training. Maintaining the strength and stamina to perform in high-level competitions required a commitment to fitness routines.

Partly because I enjoyed working-out and particularly because I liked the atmosphere and fitness gains associated with exercise to music classes, I became qualified as an instructor and began to teach. Instructing people in exercise and fitness practices provided financial rewards as well as maintaining my own fitness. I have participated at, and taught in several fitness gyms over the years, sometimes in

public leisure centres and sometimes in private, more commercially orientated facilities. It became evident that women dominated the exercise classes I taught. It seemed that they tended to engage in exercise for burning fat and sculpting small, firm muscles. This was also apparent in the gym environment. Yet I also observed some women working-out with weights in the gym and dance studio. These women expressed a desire to develop muscular strength and power. It became clear that images of the ideal female physique were complex and that there were marked similarities and differences in the activity experiences of women who worked-out. I was interested in understanding such complexities.

Many of those who worked-out were not 'sporty' and opted for the exercise class or the gym because they did not want to be involved in physical competition. It seemed that, counter to my own experiences, the intensely physical and competitive world of sport was not the place where women could necessarily lay claim to a feminine identity. I was inquisitive about the significance of physical activity for other women. Curious about how different and similar women's sport and exercise experiences were in relation to myself and others I began to consider why they 'worked-out'. My experiences of fitness gyms revealed a paradox. It seemed that on the one hand, women at the gym, avoided the competition inherent in sport and did not feel 'feminine' when they played competitive games. On the other hand, such women were involved in a degree of rivalry with others, and in a battle against themselves as they 'worked-out' to achieve the feminine ideals of slimness and muscular tightness. This observation formed the basis for the research problem outlined in section 4.4 above. My personal involvement in sport and exercise, then, provided me with a practical research area.

The research questions and the interpretation of the evidence were also influenced by my reading and theoretical understandings of feminisms (Birrell, 1989; 2002; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Stanley, 1990;

Scraton & Flintoff, 1992, 2002; Theberge, 1985), figurational sociology (Dunning, 1992; Elias, 1978, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1997, 1991a, 1991b, 1998a, 2000; Maguire, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1999; Murphy et al., 2002), qualitative research (Bryman, 1988; Cresswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2000; Hammersley, 1989; Ribbens & Edwards, 1989; Silverman, 1997; Shipman, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and ethnography (Denzin, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Sparkes, 2002; van Maanen, 1995). As Birch (1998, p. 174) contends, theoretical insights provide the basis for understanding how to put “social research into practice”. As will be shown, my theoretical and methodological approach provided me with the practical ‘tools’ for doing qualitative research and understanding the research area.

The experiences of the women and men I have observed, listened to and spoken with, and the women I have interviewed will also be constructed and reconstructed in terms of their own cultural locations. This research took place in a public fitness gym in the South-East of England. All of the women interviewed were white, western, heterosexual and able-bodied. In addition, their employment status and family background indicated middle-class tendencies. These women were employed as teachers / instructors, managers, administrators, or as professionals in the health sector (nurse, osteopath), or they were trainees for such occupations. Their occupational status reflected that of the wider gym membership. The limited data on the social profile of members also revealed doctors, solicitors and journalists to have taken up membership. The white and western cultural background of the women interviewed also characterised the wider membership group. Membership details did not provide any clear indication of numbers of non-white, non-western exercisers. During the participant observations, two male instructors revealed themselves to be of black, Afro-Caribbean origin. I also observed some female exercisers who were not white and western. For example, I watched and overheard two women of Southeast Asian appearance and dialect although I was not able to

speak with them. In addition, I spoke briefly with one Indian female exerciser and two Indian males.

Like other feminist researchers, it has taken a long time to realise how my research questions, understanding of the research process and research methods, and interpretations of the evidence collected were influenced by my own cultural identity (Birch, 1998; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Wheaton, 2002). Several dilemmas became evident during the course of the fieldwork, and in the writing up of the research that served to illustrate such influences. Broadly speaking, these dilemmas centred on questions of representation and legitimation that characterise the “crisis of representation” central to contemporary debates about feminist research and ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2000; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Sparkes, 2000). These issues also brought to the fore, questions of involvement and detachment. Further discussion about representation, and involvement and detachment will be presented later in the sections that address how the ethnographic research was conducted and how the substantive material was analysed. The next section examines the feminist influences in this research project, in a critical discussion of feminist methodology and epistemology.

4.7 Feminist Methodology / Feminist Epistemology: A Critical Review

One of the most sustained critical discussions about methodology in research has come from feminist scholars presenting rival claims against “masculinist assumptions posing as human universals” (Ward, 1997, p. 779). Early claims for a feminist methodology were characterised by a challenge to the silencing of women, calls for more critical examinations of the limits of knowledge produced by (male) researchers adopting masculinist perspectives, and a backlash against research based upon the experiences of men (Brunskell, 1998; Maynard, 1994; Scraton & Flintoff; 1992). At issue was the idea that the identification and elimination of gender inequality needs to place women at the centre of the research process (Birrell &

Richter, 1984; Collins, 1991; Harding, 1991; Scraton & Flintoff, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993). On this basis, different feminist epistemologies developed to provide a foundation for the production of feminist knowledge that is "girl/woman *centred*" (Scraton & Flintoff; 1992, p. 173). Initially, my research questions about gender and femininity were characterised by such thinking. However, my reading about Elias's (1978, 1987) theory of involvement and detachment led me to question the idea of a feminist standpoint. Let me try to explain.

The contention that feminist knowledge can only be adequately gained through research conducted by women, on women's experiences and understandings, so that it might effect change (improvement) in women's lives is referred to as a feminist standpoint (Denzin, 1997; Hartsock, 1987; Scraton & Flintoff, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Broadly speaking, standpoint epistemologies hold that the 'truth' about social relations can only emerge from the experiences of those under scrutiny (Denzin, 1997; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002; Ward, 1997). It is argued that research from a feminist standpoint should be rooted in the everyday world of the oppressed subject, woman (Hartsock, 1987). A claim to a privileged feminist epistemology is implicit in much that is written about the feminist standpoint position. Feminist standpoint theorists would contend that women's oppression places *women* in the privileged position from which to empathise with, understand and know about *women's* subjugation. Such a position claims to preserve the active knowing and experiencing female subject without making her the object of study (Scraton & Flintoff, 1992). Yet, this view seems to be based on relatively unexamined feminist methodological and epistemological assumptions. The question about whether the inclusion of unexamined feminist assumptions in the research process can advance our funds of knowledge about gender and sport was raised in Chapter 1. Here, the problems of a feminist standpoint position are explored in more detail.

At least three points of criticism can be presented against feminist standpoint research. First, such a perspective fails to recognise that questions of gender are not simply questions about women but are also about men, and the relations between the two. Second, the feminist standpoint tends to present women as a homogeneous group. In other words, there is an assumption that all women are equally oppressed, regardless of cultural differences and similarities, and without due consideration of, for example, the class background, or age and (dis) ability status of particular women (and men). Gender is considered as a universal category without adequate attention to variations of social oppression between and among groups of women. Aspects of race / ethnicity, age, social class and (dis)ability as well as gender represent an interwoven network of processes that construct and reconstruct the relative subjugation of both women and men. And third, as Abbott and Wallace (1997, p. 293) explain, inherent in the standpoint argument is an assumption that *experience* directly corresponds with 'truth'. Feminist standpoint epistemology can also be criticised as a perspective that reflects a position of cultural relativism whereby all knowledge and, thus, claims to truth are "localised" and can be "reduced" to the social characteristics of specific (female) groups (Ward, 1997, p. 774). Furthermore, the relativist argument would contend that all accounts and claims to truth are equally valid. Yet as Maguire and Young (2002) and Sugden and Tomlinson (1999, 2002) argue, to take such a position removes the interpretive role of the sociologist and, thus, leaves no space to critically explore power relations and identity politics as this research seeks to do.

In a detailed critique of feminist standpoint epistemology Denzin (1997) explains that while standpoint researchers emphasise lived experience, it is often the case that the experience of the 'other' is missing from the text. He goes on to discuss that rather than the place of the writer being clarified, the author's voice is privileged and left largely unexamined. Furthermore, he questions the "romantic,

utopian” ideals of several standpoint authors who reflect a belief that the recovery of lived experience will help to construct “something good” in the world (Denzin, 1997, p. 54). To paraphrase Denzin (1997, p. 54), a politics of action is rarely presented in scholarship that does not examine the place and role of the researcher in the research process.

The shortcomings of research that fails to critically analyse feminist principles can be said to provide an inadequate investigation of the relational nature of gender (Colwell, 1999; Dunning, 1992, 1999; Murphy et. al., 2000). In being more ideologically informed than empirically-based it is questionable that such feminist research can generate adequate knowledge about gender and sport or whether such knowledge can provide an effectual platform for political action (Dunning, 1992). This does not negate the potential for feminist research to add to knowledge about gender and sport. As indicated in Chapter 1, Elias’s ideas about achieving a balance between involvement and detachment in research may serve to produce more reality-congruent feminist investigations. In the next section, I explain how the research process in this project has been guided by Elias’s thoughts on the production of knowledge in sociological investigations.

4.8 Feminist-Figurational Research: Some Sensitising Concepts

Elias has made a significant contribution to epistemological and ontological debates in sociology in his discussions about the sociology of knowledge (Elias, 1978, 1987, 1991a, 1991b). Elias’s argument that the advancement of relatively adequate or reality-congruent knowledge in the social sciences partly depends on the value orientation of researchers was highlighted in Chapter 1. Elias (1978) explains that the evaluation of social relations, and the production of reality-congruent knowledge is a matter of achieving a balance and blend of involvement and detachment. The methodology of involvement and detachment is explored in this section as a way of producing reality-congruent knowledge about gender, feminine

bodies and the fitness gym. Several sensitising concepts, related to the theory of involvement and detachment, have been useful in examining the research questions in this project. These concern the personal pronoun model, the use of developmental thinking, the interplay between evidence and theoretical analysis and the adequacy of evidence. Let me try to explain.

In terms of producing relatively high degrees of adequate knowledge, Elias (1978) proposed that sociologists should be encouraged to investigate the social relations in which they are involved, while at the same time, striving to distance themselves from the objects of their investigations. Dunning's (1992) fifth guideline for effective research advises that researchers should work in areas that they are interested in and in which they have practical knowledge. I will return to his other four guidelines later. Here, I have already illustrated my involvement in this research project. Throughout, the challenge has been to balance my involvement with the subject matter with an appropriate degree of distance from the fitness gym, the women I have interviewed, and from my feminist assumptions about female bodies, gender relations, sport and society.

Elias (1987, p. 6) referred to the process of self-distancing as the "detour via detachment". The *detour* is not a matter of avoiding an involved position in favour of a detached one. Social researchers cannot avoid being involved in their subject matter. Indeed such involvement is a condition of understanding any research problem. Dunning (1992) explains that taking a detour via detachment seeks to maximize the degree to which the findings of investigations correspond to the objects of study. A detour via detachment, then, is a means of avoiding, as far as possible, the encroachment of emotional evaluations, personal fantasies and the short-term interests of individuals or groups upon the work of researchers. In striving for a relative degree of detachment from the fitness gym, and from the women I interviewed, I have taken on board Dunning's (1992, p. 251) comment that

“sociologists cannot and *should not* abandon their political interests and concerns”. Underpinning the design and conduct of this research study, then, was a personal and academic interest in the identity politics surrounding images of the female body and contemporary fitness activities.

The ideas about involvement and detachment presented so far resonate with some feminist scholarship concerning what constitutes proper research. For example, in a discussion about the nature and assumptions of the knowledge produced by feminist researchers, Ribbens and Edwards (1998, p. 4) state that “While we may wish to attain the status of detached and objective observer, producing ‘expert’ and ‘superior’ forms of knowledge, such claims are open to doubt”. The alternative relativist position is also not advocated. Rather, Ribbens and Edwards (1998, p.4) support a “perspectival view of knowledge” that recognises that “who you are and where you are situated, does make a difference to the knowledge you produce”.

It should be noted that Dunning’s (1992, p. 251) comment concerning the significance of a researchers political views to understanding research presents a further contradiction to Colwell’s (1999) implication, highlighted in Chapter 1, that figurational sociologists are non-evaluative. Elias’s approach to the problem of knowledge also seems to be misunderstood, to some extent, by Hargreaves (1992, p. 178). Her assertion that figurationists reject a moral and ethical stance and adopt a view lacking “a connection between theory and radical politics and practice” is misleading. Not only was Elias concerned with explaining social events, and examining how sociological theories could help in understanding the trend of social problems, but he was explicitly concerned with “providing practical solutions” to those problems (Elias, 1987, p. 153). As Dunning (2002, p. 13) points out, “Elias’s synthesis was orientated towards the building-up of knowledge that is practically useful.”

Some of the knowledge produced in this research has been practically useful to the people at the fitness gym under investigation. For, example, many of the women interviewed explained that the open-plan shower room in the female changing room served to intensify their feelings of embarrassment about their naked bodies. Sometimes this was a matter associated with the cosmetic appearance of the body, and sometimes it was an issue of modesty concerning the naked body. At times, these feelings of corporeal anxiety had served to prevent them from working-out. Such concerns were articulated to the management team when we talked about my research. Subsequently, private changing 'cubicles' for female exercisers were constructed. A second example relates to the finding that, for some, muscles and strength are an increasingly acceptable part of the female body. Several informal conversations with fitness instructors revealed that they had come to recognise that the development of muscular strength might challenge the more stereotypical image of 'soft' female bodies. Such exercise professionals included muscular strength practices such as weight training into their exercise programmes with a view to empowering women.

Elias emphasised that social scientists cannot discard their more involved, political commitments and simply adopt a more detached role. It was his contention, with regard to social scientists, that their own involvement is itself one of the conditions for understanding the problems they seek to resolve (Elias, 1987, p. 16). In order to understand human experiences, an 'insider' status *is* needed. The difficulty faced by such researchers is how to blend the roles of inquirer and participant. As Maguire and Young (2002, p. 16) explain, "the sociologist-as-participant" must employ the capacity to become the "sociologist-as-observer-and-interpreter". The act of blending the role of inquirer and participant in this research project is underpinned by the theory of involvement and detachment (Dunning, 1992; Maguire & Pearton, 1986; Maguire, 1988; Maguire & Young, 2002).

The practicalities of taking a detour via detachment remain difficult and complex and the methodology of involvement and detachment does require investigation beyond the scope of this chapter. Rojek (1986, p. 591), for example, argues that Elias did not provide any “guidelines”, “mechanisms” or “drill” for achieving a relative degree of detachment. Nevertheless, using the work of Dunning (1992) and Maguire (1988, 1995) and Maguire and Young (2002) there are several ways in which I have endeavoured to achieve a relatively detached position in this research study.

Exploring the need for an adequate balance of involvement and detachment for effective research, Dunning (1992, p. 252) sets out five rules for accomplishing a degree of distance from the objects of study. Maguire (1988), Maguire and Pearton (1986) and Maguire and Young (2002) also address these rules. The rules for achieving a relative degree of detachment have guided the research in this project. Rule five, the rule of involvement, has already been considered. Let me address the other four rules.

First, Dunning (1992) highlights that appropriate attention to the historical location of research will develop greater detachment. Historical sociology can take various forms. This research project aimed to embrace a developmental approach (Dunning et al., 1993; Maguire, 1995). In doing so, I sought to gain a time perspective on the exercise experiences of the women I interviewed so that I could better understand how their present exercise behaviours have developed. As will be shown, a life history framework was used to understand how the present exercise rituals, practices and techniques of the women interviewees were connected to past corporeal experiences. Observing and describing the behaviours of those who worked-out and probing, through interviews, how some women perceived their bodies and exercise throughout their lives, it was possible to “judge, interpret, explain and make sense” of the exercise process (Maguire, 1995, p. 9). In doing so, the aim

was to be, as Elias (1978, p. 50) puts it a “destroyer of myths” about gender relations. The term used by Elias is “*Mythenjager*” which is translated as “a hunter and destroyer of myths” (Maguire, 1995, p. 9).

The adoption of developmental thinking is not only part of the craft of self-distancing, but it serves to avoid perceiving social life as timeless or radically changed in a postmodern sense (Maguire & Young, 2002). Thinking about social relations in processual, relational terms will also help to avoid static, present-centred understandings of the world. As was shown in Chapter 6, the personal pronoun model offers a useful way of communicating and understanding the interdependent and dynamic, and temporally and spatially orientated relationships that people have with each other.

An examination of the long-term structured processes by which the contemporary fitness industry developed was beyond the scope of this project. Following Maguire's (1995) ideas about developmental thinking, such an investigation would signify a further attempt to understand the relationships between personal exercise behaviour and the social organisation of the fitness industry as processes that are continually constructed in time and space. Exemplars of this type of work in feminist and figural research respectively are Hargreaves's (1994) social history of the development of female sports and Dunning and Sheard's (1979) study of the development of Rugby Football. An in-depth examination of the developmental history of the fitness industry would help to further an understanding of the contemporary obsession with working-out at fitness gyms. This is a theme for further research.

Dunning's (1992) second rule of relative detachment is connected to his third. In his second rule, he explains the importance of exploring social processes for their own merits in order to avoid the bias associated with personal interest and emotional involvement. Dunning's (1992) third rule emphasises that one way of advancing

more detached thinking is for sociologists to consider themselves and their work through the perceptions of others rather than through their own self-oriented lenses. A key characteristic of this ethnographic study of the fitness gym is a commitment to viewing the practice of working-out from the perspective of the exercisers I have observed and spoken with. Following Bryman (1988, p. 61), the aim was to “empathize (though not necessarily sympathize) with” the exercisers in the fitness gym, and probe the “frames of meaning” within which they worked-out. A fundamental aspect of this research, then, was “seeing through the eyes of” the people being studied (Bryman, 1988, p. 61). For Dunning (1992), this is part of the strategy for effective research. Furthermore, such an approach is advocated by several feminist writers committed to maintaining the viewpoint of the research subjects as expressed in their daily language (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Fontana & Frey, 1998; Seale, 1998; Stanley & Wise, 1983, 1990).

In his fourth rule of procedure Dunning (1992) explains that, in striving for an appropriately detached position, researchers must relate their work to the existing body of knowledge in their particular field of inquiry. Furthermore, he states that researchers should relate their “observations to a body of theory” and their “theories to a body of observations” (Dunning, 1992, p. 253). Maguire and Young (2002, p. 15) reinforce this point in their discussion of the “interwoven” and “indivisible” relationship between theory and evidence. The necessity for the interplay between theory and evidence underpins the analysis presented throughout the chapters in this thesis. Chapters 1 and 2 set out the theoretical approach of this research. Chapter 3 explores a range of literature concerned with several ways of theorising about the sociology of the body. Chapters 1, 2 and 3, then, provide a theoretical framework in which to locate my observations in this research. Underpinning the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 is Elias’s (1987, p. 20) point that if observational evidence is not adequately informed by theory it remains “unorganized and diffuse” and if theory is

not sufficiently informed by observation of events it remains “dominated by feelings and imaginings”. Either extreme may lead to inadequate research.

Weak and inadequate research may arise through misconceptions about social processes and / or be related to doubtful substantive material and un-informed interpretations (Maguire, 1988, 1995; Maguire & Young, 2002). Furthermore, the adequacy of more ideologically-informed than empirically-based research is questionable (Dunning, 1992). This does not mean that researchers in the social sciences must give up on the task of producing valid knowledge. As Murphy et al. (2000, p. 94) explain, sociologists can only aspire to develop knowledge that has a greater degree of adequacy than previous understandings. Elias (1978) himself explains that researchers can only aim to contribute to and advance existing stocks of knowledge.

In terms of feminist research, a sense of what “counts as adequate approximations to knowledge” is harnessed by the emphasis on a critical examination of the nature and assumptions surrounding the knowledge that is being produced, and who that knowledge is being produced for (McLennan, 1995, p. 397). These epistemological questions also characterise the work of figurational sociologists who are mindful of the need to examine the “status” of knowledge produced in research as well as “the ability of researchers to capture ‘how it really is’” (Maguire & Young, 2002, p. 17). Maguire (1988, 2002) indicates that evaluation of the adequacy of evidence in any research project rests upon understanding the exact pattern of power relations between researchers and research subjects. This idea dovetails with feminist scholarship that is mindful of how power differences between the researcher and research subject impact on the production of knowledge about gender (Scruton & Flintoff, 1992; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Stanley & Wise, 1983). Identification with particular ‘I’ / ‘Me’ and ‘We’ / ‘They’ perspectives of different

people and groups in the research context can help the researcher to understand why certain actions and emotions are meaningful.

Elias's theories on involvement and detachment offer a way of producing more object-adequate research, as well as a providing a means of examining the adequacy of knowledge over the course of social development. In terms of the study of gender, the emphasis in figurational sociology is on striving for a relatively detached analysis that does not privilege and celebrate either male or female sport (Murphy et al., 2002). Such a position represents a counter argument to Hargreaves's (1992, p. 162) comment that the "quest for detachment" leads figurational sociologists to accept and maintain male ideologies about sport.

My experiences in this research project have led me to conclude that feminists could use their feminist involvements as a source of motivation and 'insider' knowledge, while, at the same time, striving to maximize their detachment in the ways outlined above. Such a balance and blend of involvement and detachment may contribute to the production of a relatively undistorted picture of sport and gender relations. In order to develop more adequate knowledge about gender relations figurationists should continue to examine the masculinist and, or feminist assumptions in their research. Any sociologist seeking to advance an understanding of sport and gender relations might shed light on the problematic by enquiring about females and males, and femininity and masculinity, in relational terms.

Having discussed the feminist and figurational (process) assumptions of this research project the task now is to "lay bare" the research strategy and procedures associated with the collection and analysis of evidence (Bryman and Burgess, 1994, p. 216).

4.9 The Research Strategy: An Ethnography of The Fitness Gym

Initially, a useful reference point for the development of this research strategy, as well as for the more detailed theoretical and methodological discussions within this chapter has been Denzin and Lincoln's (1998, p. 25) five-phase model of the qualitative research process (1. the researcher as multicultural subject; 2. theoretical paradigms and perspectives; 3. research strategies; 4. methods of collection and analysis; and 5. the art of interpretation and presentation). So far, in this chapter, some of the concerns associated with phases 1 and 2 have been considered. This section discusses some of the issues that have also arisen out of phases 3, 4 and 5. Several issues have arisen during the development of the research strategy, and in the collection, interpretation and presentation of the substantive evidence. It has become clear, for example, that ethnographic fieldwork, the conceptualisation of theoretical concepts, and understanding 'other' women who work-out, is characterised by questions about access, observer role, selection and probing of interviewees, recording of evidence, and dilemmas about representation and legitimation (Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002; Denzin, 1997; Van Maanen, 1995). Let me try to explain how I have worked through these dilemmas.

Guiding the research strategy was the principal aim of examining the figural dynamics of the fitness gym and to explore how bodies are central to the construction and reconstruction of gendered social inequality, and the formation of gendered identities. Two specific questions have driven the strategy adopted in this project. The first, asked what patterns and relations of power underpin the production of feminine body ideals? The second was, what are the relationships between power, bodies and the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities in the fitness gym. In answering these questions there was a third research aim. The project presented an opportunity to explore the theoretical and methodological relationships between feminist and figural (process) sociology, and to see what a feminist-

figurational perspective could offer in exploring the research questions. Detailed discussions about the relationships between feminisms and figurational (process) sociology are provided elsewhere in the thesis (see Chapters 1 and 2, and this chapter). Here, it is emphasised that the exercise body-beautiful complex introduced in figure 1 (see page 10) identifies selected, and interdependent, influences central to the relationships between women, their bodies, femininities and the fitness gym. This complex took shape as the research was conducted. It helped me to make sense of what I was seeing in the fitness gym. In addition, it served as a guide for my observations as the research progressed. Initially, the complex highlighted several corporeal themes that might be important during the more formal interviews such as: the significance of diets and dieting, relationships between personal body image and media images of female bodies, the influence of 'scientific' and 'medical' understandings of female physical activity and sport, and the impact of fitness and health professionals on perceptions of female bodies and the practice of exercise.

It was the intention of this research project to examine the experiences of exercisers at a fitness gym and to speak, in more depth, to a community of women who 'worked-out'. Important in this regard was how participants made sense of their exercise practices, rituals and techniques. Furthermore, I wished to understand how they interpreted and understood broader cultural images of, and messages about female fitness, health and beauty such as those presented by personnel within the medical professions, diet technologies, the media and the fitness and health industries. Given the emphasis on trying to understand the meanings underpinning the social and cultural world of the fitness gym, the research methods selected for this endeavour were, broadly speaking, ethnographic. Prior to explaining precisely how the evidence was collected, analysed and interpreted, some of the general characteristics that mark out this research as ethnographic are presented.

Ethnography has its roots in the comparative cultural anthropology of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown (Cresswell, 1998; Hammersley, 1998; Sands, 2002; Van Maanen, 1995). Ethnographic research emerged out of the critique of positivism and with the development of the interpretive paradigm. However, there has never been agreement on the nature of the alternative (interpretive) paradigm and in terms of contemporary research a diversity of ethnographic methods are used in a range of disciplines. The extensive literature concerning ethnography reveals that the precise requirements of ethnographic research are unclear and that ethnography is characterised by intense epistemological debate (Denzin, 1997; Sparkes, 2002; Van Maanen, 1995). Nevertheless, there are some principal aims of the ethnographic endeavour that are relatively uncontested and these underpin this research project in the several ways. Let me indicate some of them.

The research strategy in this project takes the central feature of ethnography to be participant observation (Cresswell, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Walsh, 1998; Sands 2002). Following Hammersley and Atkinson's (1989, p. 2) definition, this ethnography involved me participating at the gym, overtly, for an extended period of time (18 months), watching, listening, asking questions and collecting information from any source that might shed light on the research problem. Furthermore, the multi-method character of ethnography has provided the basis for *triangulation* in which evidence from participant observation, including the collection of documents and artefacts, and interviewing has been systematically compared (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Walsh, 1998)

In terms of a method, the five characteristics of ethnographic research outlined by Hammersley (1998, p. 2) have provided a guide for doing this ethnography of the fitness gym. *First*, the behaviours of those who worked out were studied in their everyday context by the researcher participating and observing at the gym in question. *Second*, data were gathered from a range of sources but the main

research tools were (participant) observation and relatively informal conversations. *Third*, the evidence was collected in a relatively “unstructured” manner. I did not set out and follow a detailed plan, nor did I fix the themes of analysis from the outset. While I was still mindful of the need to be systematic in my approach and precise in my factual references, the evidence collected was in “as raw a form, and on as wide a front” as possible. *Fourth*, the study focused small number of cases, seeking to explore the life histories of a few female exercisers. And, *fifth*, the analysis in this thesis involves interpretation of meaning. More specifically, some of the concepts and theories from feminisms and a figurational / process approach are utilised in interpreting the interview and observation material. Given these general principles, the following sections explain how the techniques of participant observation and interviewing were employed in practice, and how the evidence collected was analysed.

4.10 Access and Phases of Research

One of the issues to be considered from the outset of this project was that of access to the field of research. In the first instance, access to the fitness gym was a practical matter. I had been a member of the gym since 1996 when it first opened. I worked close to it in the same city in the South East of England. Indeed, I had been involved in the design and setting up of the fitness gym that was established by members of the University College Department where I was, and continue to be, employed as a lecturer. There have been two managers at the gym since its inception, and my relationship with both is as colleague and friend. During the period 1996-1998, I ‘worked-out’ at the gym on most days and taught exercise to music classes once a week. This was a period in which I began to formulate ideas about the sorts of questions I might ask. My access to the gym and to the people who worked-out there reflected what Birch (1998, p. 176) refers to as a “networking system” based on employment and friendship relationships. The manager and staff

at the gym were positive about the research that I was doing and there did not seem to be any barriers to my work. I was given the freedom, by the staff at the gym to observe all facets of life at the fitness gym, including exercise classes, gym 'work-outs', client inductions, personal training sessions and staff meetings. Furthermore, I was free to negotiate access to individuals for the purpose of interviewing. It will be shown later that while there were no problems in gaining access to the fitness gym in this project, deciding on how best to access people to be interviewed was more problematic.

When I explained the questions I was asking and the methods I wanted to employ to the staff at the fitness gym, the response was always one of curiosity. They wanted to know more about the research, were keen to offer their own answers to the questions I was asking and wanted to know what I had found. Such interest demonstrated from the outset that access is not just a practical matter but also a theoretical one. Hammersley and Atkinson (1989) highlight that *barriers* to access can shed light on the social organisation of a research setting in terms of how people respond to strangers. In this research, the absence of any obstacles to access, indeed the obvious willingness to talk of those who might be referred to as 'gatekeepers' to the gym began to illustrate and inform some of the corporeal themes that would emerge during the more intensive participant observation and interviewing phases of the research. Some brief examples will illustrate this point.

From the outset, I highlighted that the research was concerned with gendered bodies and female body images. The overwhelming response of the management and staff of the gym was that this was a most significant area of discussion. One instructor, Adam, noted "that's all we do you know, help women lose fat and tone up". The manager, Michael added "well we like to look at women who are slim and toned". Adam responded to this remark saying "yeah, but some girls can't ever get the model look and anyway you've got to let people be the way they are ... I mean

bodies are differentlots of bodies look good. I think we can get that message across more". The deputy manager, Fiona agreed with Adam saying: "Michael's a bit sexist really. It's a shame we are so driven by the glossy mags. Some girls don't want to be all thin". What was becoming clear through my initial access to the gym was that female body images were more complex than the singular image of thinness portrayed in the media, and reflected in the philosophy and practice of aerobics (Kenen, 1987; Kagan & Morse, 1988; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Mansfield & Maguire, 1999; Markula, 1995). Furthermore, what counts as feminine, in the gym at least, seemed to be marked by processes of negotiation. My ideas about the nature of the research problem began to take shape in this period of gaining access to the fitness gym and from April 1998 to October 1999, the phases of participant observation and interviewing took place.

The journey towards the construction of the account in thesis form has taken another four years. It has involved many stages of theoretical and personal reflection and can best be described itself as a web of interdependencies involving myself, my female interviewees, exercisers at the fitness gym, friends and esteemed colleagues. These relationships have provided the possibility of understanding how to do this research and how to interpret and present the findings. The phases of negotiating access, collection of evidence and analysis, interpretation and presentation overlap (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Van Maanen, 1995). Indeed, while the formal procedures of participant observation and interviewing took place over 18 months, the study is informed by my involvement with the fitness gym before and after the 'defined' period of research. With varying degrees of involvement and detachment, I have been reflecting on what I see and what I hear in fitness gyms for at least *ten* years. The next section explains the participant observation phase of the research.

4.11 Participant Observations

I was in a position of knowing the context in which I wanted to research and my relationships with the 'gatekeepers' were such that they would grant me permission to conduct the research. Still, I was mindful that such positive relationships could affect the research because, in the first instance, I was getting direct access to the opinions of those who 'know' about working-out. In other words, my initial contacts and informants were 'insiders' in the fitness gym.

Many of the staff wanted to be interviewed for the study claiming 'superior' knowledge about the themes and issues of my research. Furthermore, I was often given advice about what to watch, who to observe, and who to speak to. Immediately, my task was to take a more detached perspective in terms of my observational role. My aim as a participant observer was to treat the fitness gym as 'strange' so as to make clear the assumptions taken for granted as a cultural member. In other words, the objective was to adopt a marginal position, both practically and in terms of perspective, to capture experiences of working-out in the fitness gym and of the "social rules or patterns that constitute it" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. 8).

There are many observer roles open to any researcher ranging from complete participant to complete observer (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Walsh, 1998, Sands, 2002). At the beginning of the research I was, arguably, a complete participant in the sense that I was already a member of the culture that I wanted to research. Initially, the benefits of such involvement were that I could gain 'inside' knowledge and, as already discussed, I was able to avoid the problem of negotiating access. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1989) explain, a complete participant role will eventually be extremely limiting because the research activity and knowledge gained will be restricted to established social routines and realities. By remaining involved with the staff of the fitness gym, it became clear that I would not

learn very much about being a stranger in the gym and the culture shock associated with estrangement (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Sands, 2002). What seemed to be at issue here was to achieve a balance between involvement and detachment in whatever observer role I employed. In practice I sought to achieve such a balance by adopting a flexible approach to participant observation, exploiting different roles to obtain a variety of evidence and to understand the biases associated with such roles. A degree of openness characterised the observer roles adopted, although not all those being observed knew that I was a researcher. Let me provide some examples.

The initial decision was to adopt an openness about the research intentions. Yet, exactly what I told people about the research varied. For example, in gaining access to the research setting, I explained the purpose, aims and methods of my research to the staff of the fitness gym. Given the way in which the exact nature of this type of research changes over the course of the fieldwork, this was all the information I could give at the time. Once I had gained access, it was not practical, or necessary to tell everyone, every time something emerged that impacted on the way I was collecting the evidence or interpreting the findings. It was not that I wished to be deceptive, but telling the 'whole truth' was not practical. Furthermore, I wished to see how my field relationships developed. I wanted to establish myself as trustworthy in case I needed access to more delicate or personal information than was required at the outset. I also wanted to expand my contacts within the fitness gym.

Not giving full details of the method and intentions at all times proved to be a useful strategy. For example, the initial interest of staff at the gym, and their attempts to be involved as research subjects seemed to indicate that the behaviour of those being researched might be influenced when they are privy to detailed information about the research. Yet, as the study progressed, I did not provide detailed answers to their questions and explained that I had already selected people to be interviewed. Over time, the gatekeepers came to see me, and my research not as a novelty, but

as part and parcel of the daily life at the fitness gym. To an extent, I had gained some distance from their insider perspective.

Having distanced myself from the gatekeepers, I could begin to re-evaluate my field roles in order to establish a more precise pattern of the social relationships that influenced the production and reproduction of female body images, and feminine identities in the fitness gym. In practice, the research involved a range of observer positions that blended participation with observation. The question arose as to how much I would or should participate. Yet each observation presented different and dynamic sets of factors, and the extent of participation and my observer position shifted with, and during, each observation. Being flexible, a role that was suitable to the demands of the situation was accommodated (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989) For example, in the dance studio when I was observing exercise to music classes, sometimes I participated in the whole class and wrote field notes after the session. I did this as an instructor and as an exercise participant. Sometimes, I participated in some of the class and took breaks to write my field notes and observe the exercise activities. In the gym, there were times when I worked-out and was a participant observer. In this role I completed my field notes as I rested, cooled down and stretched on the mat area. Primarily sitting to cool down meant I could write my notes and take on more of an observer than participant role. In the female changing rooms, I observed as I changed and showered. Sometimes I would jot down observation notes as they happened. Often, though, I wished to be a little more inconspicuous in the changing rooms. I was concerned that overtly watching people as they showered and changed and visibly writing as I observed would be unethical, voyeuristic, and somewhat disconcerting for female gym members! They might alter their behaviour if they felt embarrassed or suspicious of my intentions. So, in this setting, I was more covert. I took my time to

shower, I listened and watched, and then completed my field notes in the reception area of the fitness gym.

The participant observation phase of the research lasted for 18 months. During this time I went to the gym at least 3 times per week as part of my own fitness routine. In addition, I took on the role of an instructor in some exercise-to-music classes during the course of the research. Once the research problem had been formally defined, I was always a researcher in the gym. My own fitness sessions always involved some degree of observation and reflection about the research questions. Information was also gathered through informal discussions over coffee or a social drink with friends, colleagues and sometimes members of the gym. As will be shown in the section on interviewing, participant observation and conversation overlap. Throughout the research, there seemed to be a continual dialogue between the researcher and the research subjects regarding the range and form that the research questions would take.

As part of the need to experience the fitness gym as strange so as to highlight the assumptions taken for granted as an established cultural member, I also went to the gym to try new exercise practices like boxercise and yoga. In doing so, I felt something akin to Sand's (2002, p. 32-33) explanation of "culture shock". My considerable experience of sport, exercise and fitness training did not fully prepare me for either boxercise or yoga. The aggressive punching practices in the boxercise class challenged my own perceptions of femininity and female bodies. Initially, I found it impossible to 'throw' a series of punches, or to punch with any real conviction. While I did develop the strength and stamina to complete a routine of punches, I was never comfortable with the boxercise class. I found the metaphors of fighting and causing bodily harm antithetical to my own attitudes about women, sport and exercise. Yoga, on the other hand was a positive experience where, counter to my preconceptions, I was able to experience fitness gains in a physically challenging

activity. In both the boxercise and yoga contexts, my sense of discomfort and disorientation was replaced by some degree of "competence" and a sense of "belonging" (Sands, 2002, p. 36). Such experiences reflect processes of involvement and detachment with the research context and they helped me to experience and understand the behaviours of outsiders in the fitness gym.

On reflection, situations in which I became a participating member of the culture can be defined as "experiential ethnography" (Sands, 2002, p. 124). I was constantly mindful of the danger of adopting the extreme position of 'going native' in which I was so immersed in the culture that I sympathised and defended the views of the exercisers at the fitness gym (Burgess, 1982; Gold, 1958; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Sands, 2002). Maguire's (2004) discussion of the problem of an overly involved perspective in sports science is relevant here. Being too close to the interests of specific groups leads to an "unreflective", "uncritical" and "atheoretical" perspective (Maguire, 2004, p. 313). What was principally at issue in this research project was the management of marginality. In this study, maintaining an intellectual position between strangeness and familiarity was guided by the principles of involvement and detachment previously discussed. One other particular claim to achieving a relative degree of detachment in this research is the "cognitive tension" that I constantly experienced in maintaining and balancing my roles as researcher and cultural member, and as established / outsider in the fitness gym (Sands, 2002, p. 128). For Hammersley & Atkinson (1989, p. 101) this "continual sense of insecurity" is crucial to the ethnographic endeavour. Maintaining some social and intellectual distance creates the space for one's analytical and critical perspective.

Written field notes were the principal way in which I recorded my observations and experiences in the fitness gym. I took photographs of the research setting and of people working-out, and I also collected 'artefacts' such as fitness magazines, advertisements for exercise classes, personal training brochures,

recording sheets for exercise programmes, membership application forms and information leaflets about beauty and therapeutic treatments. In short, I collected any material that I thought might be of use in this research project. In practice, the field notes varied in form and presentation from neatly word-processed prose to scribbled notes on random pieces of paper. From the outset, I endeavoured to be meticulously ordered about my field notes. I began by filing each set of notes in plastic wallet covers having word-processed them in exactly the same format. Yet, the realities of ethnographic fieldwork meant that my field notes comprised a collection of scribbles, notes, long descriptions, and detailed reflections written on any kind of paper available at the time. I also maintained a notebook of analytical memos, comments on method, and reflections about the interplay between theory and evidence. One might have thought that a laptop computer would have served to make the process of note-taking easier. Yet, in this study, using a laptop was impractical. This does not mean that the recording of evidence was poorly executed. Whatever form the notes took, they were always legible, dated and sequenced and included reflections on the theoretical relevance of the evidence. While participant observation has been identified in this chapter as the central feature of ethnography, interviewing is also an important technique for understanding cultures. The next section introduces the use of interviewing in qualitative research.

4.12 Interviewing in Qualitative Research

It is well documented that asking people questions about their lives and listening to what they have to say can provide a clearer understanding of the actions and emotions of the research subjects in question (Berg, 1995; Bryman, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 1998; Hammersley, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989). Yet, there seems to be no consensus about interview methodology. There are many types and uses of interviews each underpinned by different methodological assumptions. A wealth of literature exists providing various

perspectives and guidelines about what constitutes a successful interview and what counts as a good interviewer (Berg, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 1998; Hammersley, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; McCracken, 1998). There is no scope to provide details of these discussions here. Rather, in order to provide a framework for understanding the way that interviewing was employed in this study, some of the main distinctions between the two extreme types of interview, the structured interview and the unstructured interview are set out.

The different forms and uses of interviewing are defined in terms of the degree of structure or standardisation with which they are conducted. Interviews can be categorised in terms of a continuum from the structured (standardised) type to the unstructured type. Structured interviews are similar in design to social surveys or questionnaires. A set of predetermined questions, based on limited response types are used to elicit the opinions and attitudes of research subjects (Berg, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 1998). For Seale (1998, p. 202), such interviews are conducted in the “*classical*” framework of social survey work. Yet, since the interpretivist challenge towards quantitative methodology and, particularly in terms of debates about the authenticity of interview data, qualitative researchers have questioned this classical approach.

A major criticism of structured interviews is that, while the investigation of opinions and attitudes reflects a more qualitative research purpose, paradoxically, the epistemological assumptions underpinning the design, conduct and analysis of structured interviews is associated with quantitative methodology. The concepts of causal relationships, prediction, control and repeatability frame the development of particular questions and the selection of a sample of respondents. Interviewee accounts are assessed in terms of how accurately they reflect the social world; that is how objective they are (Seale, 1998). Furthermore, comparisons between subject responses are used to establish that the results of standardised interviews can be

generalised beyond particular investigations (Bryman, 1988; Burns, 2000; Sparkes, 1992).

There are other criticisms of the structured interview. For example, what people say in interviews is not necessarily what they do in practice (Deutscher, 1973; Seale, 1998). Since interviewees cannot deviate from pre-coded responses or discuss topics not on the interview schedule, misleading information can be obtained. Seale (1998) explains that such interviews present only static, time slices of hypothetically defined social contexts. Also, there is little interaction between interviewer and interviewee with a relatively high degree of power resting with the interviewer. Structured interviews are characterised by unequal power relations whereby the interviewer has a considerable degree of autonomy in defining the topic, agenda of questions and conversational flow. Coupled with the tendency to meet the interviewee only once, trust and rapport are difficult to establish in standardised interviews.

The criticism that structured interviews are exploitative of interviewees has been commonly raised by feminist researchers (Stanley, 1990; Oakley, 1981). Yet, since the 1960s, many qualitative researchers have sought to gain more authentic accounts of subjective experience in less exploitative interview situations. 'Unstructured', 'depth' or 'life-history' interviews enable the researcher to explore the complexities of human behaviour so as to develop a deeper understanding of social relations (Seale, 1998). Unstructured interviews may vary in terms of the degree of formality, spontaneity and directive action of the researcher (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Flexibility characterises such interview techniques. Sometimes, a loosely designed topic guide might act as a checklist for the interviewer. Alternatively, the interviewer may allow the interviewee to talk about anything they feel is appropriate to a particular topic. In this sense, the task of the interviewer is to reflect upon emerging themes during the conversation, to probe the respondent and encourage them to

expand upon interesting and relevant issues, and to seek clarification on points that are made (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Seale, 1998; Spradley, 1980). The next section explains how and why relatively unstructured interviewing was employed in this study to develop an understanding of female bodies in the fitness gym.

4.13 Interviewing Female Exercisers at the Fitness Gym

Participant observation was a major resource in terms of understanding the exercise practices of those who worked out at the fitness gym. Yet, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1989) point out, not all information will be available first hand. Asking questions and listening to informants through informal and formal interviews was also a valuable tool in this research project for several reasons. Interviewing facilitated the acquisition of further information about the culture of working-out. Asking questions enabled me to gain information about activities that could not be directly observed. For example, the women and men I spoke with informally talked about exercise, sport and body maintenance routines they engaged in outside of the fitness gym. The women I interviewed formally talked about their experiences of physical activity during childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, asking questions and listening to people provided clarification, verification and conflicting evidence about inferences made from observing in the field (Locke, 1989). The spoken accounts that were obtained also provided information about the perspectives of insider and outsider groups at the gym. These perspectives were important in terms of the theoretical analysis in this thesis and demonstrated that the things people say are part of the culture being described, as well as being shaped by that culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. 107).

Some of the interviews in this research project were conducted spontaneously, in the field, whenever an opportunity to talk arose. Sometimes I initiated conversations with exercisers at the gym, but participants also took it upon themselves to speak to me. Some knew that I was doing research when they

engaged me in conversation and some did not. There were times when a non-directive approach was taken so that respondents could talk openly about their perspectives on the fitness gym. At other times, a particularly relevant issue might be highlighted that I wished to probe a little further. There were opportunities to talk about the gym, and about exercise and body maintenance practices before and after the exercise classes I participated in or instructed. The exercise class environment seemed to stimulate verbal communication. Talking about bodies characterises the way that people prepare for an exercise class and is one of the features of the teaching and learning process. In the gym, verbal communication was more limited. People tended to work-out alone, or in pairs, and there was little opportunity to engage people in lengthy conversations while they exercised. The use of machines for cardiovascular exercise and weight training individualises the process of exercise. Loud music and visual images from television entertainment, and the effort of breathing hard while working-out in the gym also hamper the flow of conversation. However, brief exchanges were possible with exercisers as they rode the bicycles, rowed and walked on the treadmills, when they stretched or cooled down on the mats, and when they rested between exercises. I was able to listen to people talking and to what instructors were saying during inductions and personal training sessions. Many informal conversations took place in the female changing room, in the dance studio, in the gym, in the staff offices and in the reception area of the fitness gym. There were also occasions when I spoke to people in coffee shops, bars and restaurants, and in supermarkets in the local area.

Several topics emerged during the process of talking to people that clarified what had been observed, or served to inform subsequent observations and interviews. I was able to speak with people on more than one occasion and build up information about exercise behaviour and knowledge. As already highlighted, I adopted a degree of openness about my role as a researcher. Some of the people I

spoke with would reflect upon our conversations and make a point of speaking to me at other times to provide further information or clarify a previous point. Over time, it seemed that I was able to gain the trust of, and develop a rapport with, exercisers at the gym. This was the basis for conducting longer, more formal interviews with a small group of female exercisers at the fitness gym.

The purpose of conducting more in-depth, relatively formal interviews was to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between women exercisers, body image and the culture of fitness at the gym. Instead of "surveying" the terrain of the fitness gym I wished to more intensively "mine it" (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). The selection of interviewees was a key issue here. Questions arose about who to interview and how to gain access to interviewees. It has been noted that there were several insider (gatekeeper) people willing to talk to me at length about the themes of my research. These participants were keen to make sure that I understood the practice of working-out 'correctly'. However, I did not wish to recruit such a self-selecting sample of established / insider participants for the more in-depth conversations. I did consider posting an advertisement for my research along with an invitation to be interviewed at the gym. However, this method is extensively used to access participants for physiological testing at the fitness gym. In my informal conversations I discovered that many gym members 'fear' the demands of such experimentation and I did not want my research to be ignored because it was misconstrued as a laboratory based test.

Like Miller (1998) and Standing (1998), I decided to use informal snowballing techniques to locate potential interviewees. Initially, I did not approach potential respondents. I felt that people might feel obliged to participate if I asked them. I asked the gatekeepers if they knew anyone who would like to be involved in the interview process and provided an information sheet for them to distribute to likely participants. However, the consequence of this approach was that only a selection of

insiders in the fitness gym was approached. As Miller (1998) points out, gatekeepers, via their relationships with participants exert considerable influence over who might speak in a research project. Established groups of exercisers tend to form close social bonds with other established participants and this negated the snowballing effect of selecting respondents. So I started the snowballing technique by asking some female participants in one of my exercise classes whether they, or anyone they knew, would be interested in participating in the interview process. I also placed some information leaflets in the reception area of the gym alerting people to the nature of the research. Two respondents were immediately located in this way, but two months later no one else had agreed to participate. The snowballing technique was quite a slow process! However, like Standing (1998) it enabled me to gain access to people who might not have responded to more conventional advertising methods, and to those whom I would not have contacted otherwise. To some extent, my power as a researcher was broken down through the snowballing process because the women I interviewed were able to come to terms with the nature of the interviewing by reading information leaflets and being informed by people they knew. They controlled the decision to be involved. A situation of trust began to establish even before the interviews took place.

Eventually, as I spent more time in the field, ten women agreed to be interviewed. After the first interview, two of these participants contacted me to say that they were not able to continue their involvement with the interview process. One (Jane) was pregnant with her second child and did not feel she had the time to commit herself to series of interviews. The other interviewee who wished to withdraw from the research (Ingrid) explained that she was moving out of the area. I noticed that, after withdrawing from the formal interviews, both these women still came to the gym to work-out and I was concerned that one of the receptionists, who they knew well, might have misinformed them about the research and influenced their decision

in some way. By way of “renegotiating access” to these respondents, I telephoned them to discuss the nature of the research again (Miller, 1998, p. 64). However, they explained that they were only working-out at the gym until the end of their membership and both their circumstances would make it impossible to be involved in the formal interviews. Both offered to speak to me on the telephone about the themes and issues of the project and I took the opportunity to do so during the research.

In the end, those interviewed were a small community of women who worked out at a particular fitness gym. The form used to develop the social profile of the interviewees, and a summary of the information is shown in the appendix (see page 392). These women ranged in age from 22 to 40 years. All of them were white and identified themselves as British. None of the women exhibited any visible signs of corporeal disability. All of the interviewees spoke in terms of husbands or current or previous boyfriends, arguably indicating that they were heterosexually orientated. As well as being white, western, heterosexual and able-bodied, I have previously noted in this chapter that these women's occupational status, as teachers / instructors, managers, administrators, professionals in the health sector, or trainees for such occupations suggests their middle-class character. I did not intend the sample of interviewees to be similar in terms of class, sexual orientation, physical (dis)ability or ethnic background. Indeed, I did not consciously hand-pick each respondent. From the outset, I did not assume any woman who worked-out in the fitness gym to have more or less “narrative competence” than any other the female exerciser (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 25). I did actively seek only women to be interviewed. In addition, as I have discussed earlier in the chapter, I rejected a self-selecting sample of willing *established / insider* participants for the more in-depth conversations. Instead, the precise selection of each respondent was based on the informal snowballing technique already outlined. Such a procedure enabled me to gain access to people

with whom I might not have contacted in other ways, and arguably was a means of encouraging representations of diverse and complex corporeal experiences. Following Holstein and Gubrium (1995) the aim of the sampling process in this research was not so much to capture a representative segment of the population; rather it was to solicit and analyse representative *meanings* associated with the particular culture of the fitness gym. As McCracken (1988) argues, in this type of qualitative research, the issue of sampling is not about generalisability; rather it is an issue of access to the nature of shared cultural characteristics. I was able to work longer, and in more depth, with this small group of female respondents, and to gain access to the cultural assumptions and categories of the fitness gym through them (McCracken, 1988). What they say sheds some light on the complexities of female body image and the organization and logic of fitness gym culture.

Each interviewee was interviewed between four and five times during the 18-month period of formal research. Most of the interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-quarter hours. Some lasted approximately 45 minutes and a few were conducted for as long as one-and-a-half hours. The exact duration of each interview depended on how much time respondents were able to give. I wanted to build a more detailed picture of these women's experiences of working-out than could be gained from a one-off interview. The rationale for this in-depth approach was taken from some of the literature on life history (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Sparkes, 1996, 2002; Faraday & Plummer, 1979; Goodson, 1981). There is considerable debate about what counts as life history. However, the fundamental principle employed in this research project was to try and capture a time perspective of the changing character of exercise behaviour (Sands, 2002). Goodson (1981, p. 66-67) remarks that the merits of life history are founded on the "penetration" of personal reality and making sense of "process". The intention here was to see these women in terms of

the history of their exercise biographies so that I could understand more fully their choices, attitudes and feelings towards working-out.

The interviews were more formal than those conducted in the field. Indeed, they were managed to a greater extent by the interviewer than the interviewee. A time was agreed for the interview; the location of the interview was other than in the work-out environment; all interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim; and each interview began with a particular research theme in mind. It was also the case, as Standing (1998) observes, that the researcher / interviewer is relatively powerful in terms of deciding which aspects of the interview to use, how to interpret what is said, and how to represent the voices of the women interviewed. As will be discussed in the next section, this type of judgement and interpretation is part of the sociological endeavour. Indeed as Faraday and Plummer (1979) explain, life history is well suited to the sociological enterprise by enabling the examination and utilisation of theory. Nevertheless, the relatively unstructured nature of the interviews meant that interviewees had some power to tell their own account and decide what and how much information they divulged.

I was mindful that the phrasing and framing of questions would be crucial in enabling my respondents to speak about the fitness gym and working-out (Fontana & Frey, 1998). The first interviews began with a directed question about why they worked-out. This stimulated a great deal of conversation and a two-way dialogue ensued whereby the women would ask me questions as well as respond to my queries. Indeed, all of the interviews were like long conversations in which I endeavoured to let the interviewees speak about the particular topic of the interview with minimal guidance. At times, this meant that the interviewee was in control of the interview. Sometimes, they would 'ramble' and talk about aspects of their life that did not seem to be directly related to the topic I had in mind. However, as Bryman and Burgess (1988) point out, 'rambling' is important because it can reveal a matter of

importance and concern to the interviewee. When transcribing the interviews, such 'rambling' sections often provided a lead to follow up in further interviews or observations. Examples of transcripts can be found in the appendix (page 326).

I wanted to develop close relationships with the women I spoke to so that they would reveal intimate details about their perceptions of their bodies, their personal histories and anecdotes of their experiences of exercise. As Oakley (1981) points out, intimacy can only be achieved with reciprocity. Paradoxically, I always held the interview agenda. It seemed that the probing tactics of interviewing sometimes manipulated the respondents to say more than they would have chosen (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Several of the interviews, for example, touched on sensitive issues surrounding the body and on some occasions resulted in emotional, tearful episodes. While they were free to terminate the interviews, none chose to do so, and such interviews produced insightful material.

Continually reflecting on what was being said, I used probing questions to obtain fuller accounts where necessary. Following Shatzman and Strauss (1973, p.73) probing questions related to "chronology" (what then?), "detail" (tell me more), "clarification" (I don't understand) and "explanation" (why?). After the first interview and on reflection of my field notes, several themes began to emerge. These included issues relating to the complexity of female body images, power and control over what counts as an acceptable physique or corporeal look, bodies and feminine (and masculine) identification, the long-term significance of physical activity, and adolescent experiences of the body, sport and exercise. Each of these themes provided a topic for discussion in the subsequent open-ended interviews.

The transcribed interviews were offered to the interviewees for reading and review. Some reflected on what they had said and clarified their comments at later interviews or informally during the course of the research. I did provide the women with diaries that they could use to write anything that came to mind about the nature

of the research or the topics we discussed. However, none of them found it practical to use this method of recording their thoughts. They preferred to speak to me face-to-face, or on the telephone. The final recorded conversations that we had, reflected on the topics of previous interviews and also on the interview process. The next section explains how the interview transcripts and field notes were interpreted to produce this account of bodies, femininity and the fitness gym

4.14 Analysing, Interpreting and Writing an Ethnography of the Fitness Gym

Although there are several guides, there seem to be no set procedures for analysing and writing ethnography. After the formal phases of research, I was left with two files and several notebooks of field notes, boxes of health and fitness magazines, newspaper clippings, material from the fitness gym such as posters, membership forms and exercise programmes, and approximately forty hours of transcribed interview material. All of this evidence needed translating into a coherent, accurate picture of the fitness gym. In this research project, the adequacy of the research is underpinned by the rules of involvement and detachment previously outlined. In addition, the research student / supervisor relationship helped to develop the links between theory and evidence, and thus, was part of a detour via detachment. Here, I wish to emphasise the importance of ensuring a two-way dialogue between theory and evidence in producing adequate evidence and adequate knowledge in research.

In this research project, the relationship between theory and research evidence was formulated around the principles of a "grounded theory" approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The analytical techniques of grounded theory follow a systematic set of procedures that make use of both inductive and deductive thinking about substantive evidence. The process involves a "constant interplay" between deductive propositions about theoretical concepts and relationships, and inductive attempts to interpret the evidence by allowing theoretical themes to emerge from it

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 111). This idea is reflected in Maguire and Pearton's (1986, p. 3) claim that one characteristic of the adequacy of research is the "constant interplay" between observation evidence and theoretical reasoning. Broadly speaking, the three principal stages of analysis; *open coding*, *axial coding* and *selective coding* were used to analyse and understand the observational field notes and interview transcripts in this research project.

Open coding involves the identification of general categories and their definitional characteristics. Working through the field notes and interview transcripts I wrote and highlighted all the themes or ideas that were initially of interest in terms of the broad topic of gender, sport and exercise. As Turner (1994, p. 199) suggests, these initial categories are a "basic vocabulary" for theoretical discussions. Each theme or category was given a more precise definition. So, for example, initially, the category *Body Image* was defined with reference to comments about shape, size and weight, muscular tone and tightness, colour of skin and tanning, ideal images, media images, influence of the fitness industry, diets and diet technologies, appearance of self and others, and exercise regimes. Some aspects of these definitions overlapped with several other themes. For example, dieting and diet technology, media and fitness industry images, exercise regimes and tanning also defined the category *Body Maintenance*. The task of exploring the connections between categories, and considering the theoretical concepts that might be emerging from the data was approached using the process of axial coding.

Axial coding serves to make connections between categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1990). Here, the researcher considers what conditions give rise to a category, the context in which a phenomenon takes place, the relationships that underpin the category and the consequences of those interactions. So, for example, there are relationships between *Body Image*, *Body Maintenance* and *Feminine Identity*. As will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6, the women interviewed perceived that

the shape, size and tone of their bodies identified them as feminine. Feminine identities, then, were constructed and reconstructed in the context of specific exercise practices at the fitness gym, and in terms of the relationships that women had with other exercisers and fitness professionals. This example also illustrates processes of selective coding that underpin the more detailed theoretical discussions in this thesis.

Selective coding refers to the task of integrating the categories to form a grounded theory. Here, the main story lines or issues are identified in the evidence. The story is then told analytically by giving the issues conceptual labels. For example, in terms of the production and reproduction of femininity, it became clear that, linked to the category *Adolescent Bodies*, particular stories of adolescence were significant in terms of shaping perceptions of the body and of femininity. Such stories were characterised by narratives about physical education in school, the changing physical body, attitudes of boyfriends, the bodies of female friends, the influences of parents, reading girls' / women's magazines, and dieting and exercise. Some of the links between this story line and theoretical concepts drawn from feminist and figurational / process sociologies are explored in Chapter 6. It is argued, for example, that the inculcation of feminine conduct and corporeal preferences (a feminine habitus) happen over time, and, in terms of the relationships that women have with people in a variety of social contexts. Earlier (adolescent) corporeal experiences of sport and exercise influenced the production and reproduction of feminine identities in later life.

Like Birch (1998) and Sands (2002) I made an attempt to use a computer software package; NUDIST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising) for scanning my field notes and interview transcripts for entries regarding specific categories. Unlike Sands (2002), who was able to isolate sections of data that dealt with specific topics in a meaningful way, my use of such software

was not successful. Despite attending several courses on the use of NUDIST my experience was that it is not an easy system to grasp (Richards & Richards, 1998). It relies on arrangement of the data, and coding of software and evidence so that successful scanning and identification of themes take place. The coding process takes considerable time. Even when this is done, all that is provided is a list of recurring themes and substantive examples to illustrate those themes. If I started "cutting and splicing, linking and indexing" then the nature of the setting and the story disappeared (Birch, 1998, p. 179). I found that if I read and re-read my field notes and whole interview transcripts, and manually searched to discover recurrent themes, I was getting a fuller picture of the situation at hand.

Following Bryman (1988, p. 84), the grounded theory approach appealed in this research project because it seemed to be a way of letting theory emerge from the evidence so that the "empirical referent" was always clear. The analytical procedures presented a way to manage the volume of complex and relatively unstructured evidence provided from the field notes and the interview transcripts. Furthermore, it allowed the development of feminist and figural concepts and theories that contributed to my understanding of the research problem. However, the application of a grounded theory approach in precisely the way that Glaser and Strauss (1990) set out was not without its difficulties.

Primarily, there seemed to be a contradiction in Glaser and Strauss's (1990, p.41) requirements for "theoretical sensitivity" and delaying theoretical considerations until the end of the study. Theoretical sensitivity is required to see what is there in the evidence with analytical depth. Yet, one is supposed to defer theoretical analysis until the late stages of the research. This does not seem to offer an appropriate blending of theory and evidence throughout the research project and, indeed, seemed to be an impossible task. As discussed previously in this chapter, the possibility or desirability of suspending one's knowledge of theories and concepts

and conducting research in a theoretically neutral way is questionable. The separation of method and theoretical insight is a misconception that constructs an artificial divide between the involved and detached researcher. For Elias (1978, p. 57) "The idea that people can discover a method or a tool of thought, independently of their conception of the subject matter about which knowledge is to be gained, is a product of the philosophical imagination". The experience and knowledge that defines theoretical sensitivity can be used from the outset to continually reflect on the research process. I kept a notebook of reflections about the connections between my observations and interviews, and both feminist and figural concepts and theories. The themes that emerged from the observations in this project informed the topics and agenda of questions that were asked in the interviews. Issues that were discussed at interview enabled me to see things differently, or with more clarity during subsequent observations. Following Elias (1978, p. 58) on this issue, "Systematic observation only becomes meaningful if people already have a general idea of the field of investigation".

The processes of evidence collection and analysis formed the basis for the interpretation of the fitness gym that is presented in Chapters 5 and 6. In other words, my observations and interviews revealed that gender-power relations characterise the construction of what counts in terms of female body ideals in the gym. Furthermore, it is argued that the fitness gym and exercise and fitness practices are sites for the production and reproduction of feminine identities. Linked to broader questions about representation and legitimation in research, two particular issues surrounded the process of writing up this thesis. These were concerned with reflexivity and voice. Let me try to explain.

When it came to writing this thesis, questions about who is being represented, how the cultural reality is being portrayed, and from what theoretical perspective the evidence is being understood came to the fore once again. These

questions underpin judgements about claims to knowledge and the adequacy of the knowledge being produced (Alldred, 1998; Hammersley, 1998; Mason, 1994; Sands, 2002). What was principally at issue here was the need to employ a degree of reflexivity in the writing up process. According to Alldred (1998, p. 162) reflexivity “involves being explicit about the operation of power within the actual processes of researching and representing people”. In terms of the development of the research problem and considerations about the research strategy I endeavoured to employ such reflexivity. Making explicit the theoretical and methodological basis for the interpretation and analysis provides evidence of such reflexivity (Alldred, 1998).

In the process of writing, I became concerned with the extent to which my authoritative voice as a researcher was dominating the interpretation and construction of the account of the cultural meanings assigned to femininity and fitness. At the same time, I was concerned with which research subject voices should be heard, and what parts of their voices should be listened to. These are representational issues that have been worked through, although not necessarily fully resolved, by being explicit about the methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin this research. Furthermore, I have outlined how the research has emerged from my own biography, as well as my interactions with particular feminist, figurational and ethnographic theories. I do not wish to repeat the discussion here. However, one or two further points about the interpretation of the substantive evidence can be made.

In being mindful of achieving a continual interplay between theory and evidence, and questioning the adequacy of the findings in this research project, I sought to interweave “narrative” and “theoretical” evidence in the written account (Maguire & Young, 2002, p. 18). Sands (2002, p. 94) illustrates that this approach is a way of mediating between “single authority” voice (the researcher) and “community or polyphonic” voice (the research subjects). In this thesis, descriptions from my

observation notes and talk fragments from informal and formal interviewing are dovetailed with theoretical discussions of selected key themes and issues. Such theoretical reflections are related to the existing body of knowledge about gender, femininity, sport and exercise.

I do not claim, in this research, to have listened to all women who work-out at the fitness gym, or in other fitness gyms in other cultural settings. Indeed, as my own biography, and the social profile of the gym members indicates, there is some bias in this research project. For example, the voices of black, Asian, Southeast Asian, working class, upper class, lesbian and disabled women have not been fully examined in this thesis. In terms of gender, the voices of men in the gym are somewhat marginalized, although not excluded. This research, like all research has involved particular processes of selection and interpretation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; McCracken, 1988). However, it is hoped that in applying the principles of involvement and detachment, in giving consideration to maintaining the interplay between theory and evidence and in being reflexive about the status and adequacy of the knowledge produced in this research, I have been able to “judge, interpret, explain and make sense of” some aspects of the culture of the fitness gym in an appropriately sociological manner (Maguire & Young, 2002, p. 19). The reflexivity employed throughout this research project has aimed to produce a plausible, credible and relevant account of the social dynamics of the fitness gym (Hammersley, 1997). Part of the reflexive process of research has involved consideration of the ethics of ethnographic research. The ethical issues of this project are outlined in the next section.

4.15 Ethical Considerations

Research subjects and researchers have their own concerns, interests and values that are not always compatible (Kelly, 1998; Sands, 2002; Spradley, 1980). The decisions that have been made in doing the fieldwork for this research reflect

several ethical issues. Ethical concerns may vary according to the nature of research. However, broadly speaking, research ethics refers to the adherence to moral and professional codes of conduct in the collection, analysis, reporting and publication of information about people (Marshall, 1998). The ethical principles set out by the British Sociological Association (1998, 2002) have guided this project.

The key ethical issue in this project relates to the preservation of anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the people involved. In terms of the people I have observed, it was always made clear that the research was academic in nature and that any published findings would not identify individuals at the fitness gym. All the names used in the thesis are pseudonyms. Following McCracken (1988), the women interviewed read and signed a standard ethics agreement so that freely given informed consent was recorded. A copy of the ethics agreement can be found in the appendix (see page 393). Yet, it was not practical to obtain such an agreement from everyone I spoke with and observed during the fieldwork. Having said that, I was always open about the nature of the research, why it was being undertaken and to whom the information was to be disseminated. It was made clear to the interviewees that they could refuse to participate in the project at any time. Such a statement was not made to every exerciser I observed. However, the information leaflets at the gym did make the nature of the research clear, introduce who I was and invite comment about the research process via the gatekeepers. I did not receive any negative reaction to the research project.

The women interviewed were able to see transcripts of their interviews, although the field notes were not made available to the research subjects. Some of the interviewees did read and reflect on some of their interviews. This process enabled them to clarify some of their comments although no one chose to withdraw what they had said. The intention on completion of the thesis is to inform the interviewees and provide a summary report of the findings.

4.16 Concluding Remarks

This chapter recognises that the field of qualitative research has a long history and is characterised by a diversity of competing methodological concerns and issues. It is also highlighted that qualitative researchers are faced with an array of different procedures and methods for investigating social and cultural life. Given this, and in light of the particular research questions in this project, the aims of the chapter were twofold. *First*, the methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning the research were examined. *Second*, an explanation and discussion regarding the process, strategy and techniques of the research were presented. The emphasis in this chapter is on the way particular research issues and problems were worked through in order to investigate and understand the social dynamics of a fitness gym in the South-East of England.

The research strategy is located in the interpretive paradigm where the focus is on the centrality of human meaning in the social relations at the fitness gym. The research problem then was concerned with understanding how people make sense of working-out. More specifically, the project sought to examine the significance of exercise from the point of view of a particular group of female exercisers. The way that I have come to understand the relationships between bodies, gender and working-out at the fitness gym is underpinned by theoretical and methodological concerns associated with feminist and figural sociology.

My personal involvement as a white, western, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, sports woman provided the fitness gym as a practical research area. Theoretically, the project is also marked by my feminist sensibilities. However, the limitations of a feminist standpoint are outlined. It is argued that unexamined feminist assumptions in research fail to recognise that questions about gender are concerned with women and men. In terms of gender, such a standpoint position presents women and men as homogenous and tends to disregard important differences

between and within groups of male and females. Furthermore, a feminist standpoint reflects a position of cultural relativism that negates a critical examination of the gender power relations and gender identity politics in this research project.

Elias's (1978, 1987) ideas about involvement and detachment are presented as a way of addressing some the problems of feminist standpoint research. It is argued that more adequate knowledge about gender relations in sport and exercise can be gained via a balance between an involved, insider perspective and a more detached view. In this regard, the critical evaluation of the role of values and an examination of the exact pattern of power relations between researchers and research subjects is advocated as a way to advance knowledge about gender, sport and exercise. Furthermore, it is argued that the use of developmental thinking and a focus on the constant interplay between theory and evidence are useful tools in achieving a relatively detached perspective.

The research strategy employed in this project involved an 18-month ethnographic study of gender, femininity and female bodies in the context of a fitness gym. The chapter set out the methodological concerns, procedures and dilemmas associated with both participant observation and interviewing. The research involved different observer positions that blended participation with observation. Each observation presented different and dynamic sets of factors, and the balance between participation and observation shifted with and during each observation. While participation was a major resource in this ethnographic strategy, observation and conversation overlapped. Interviewing was also an important technique in understanding the culture of the fitness gym. Talking to people was also a way to clarify and verify evidence obtained from observing in the field. Unstructured interviews were conducted whenever the opportunity arose to talk with exercisers in the fitness gym. More formal, 'depth' interviews reflecting a life-history approach were also used with a small group of female exercisers. The intention here was to

reflect upon the history of their exercise biographies so that I could understand more fully their choices, attitudes and feelings towards working-out.

Observation field notes and interview transcripts were analysed using the principles of Glaser and Strauss's (1990) grounded theory approach. The critical examination of the application of the grounded theory method illustrates, once again, the indivisible nature of theory and evidence. In questioning the adequacy of the evidence and interpretation in this research project the need for reflexivity is emphasised. Included in the research process are reflections about the power relations between the researcher and research subjects. In addition, the project is open and explicit about the theoretical, methodological and ethical basis for the analysis. Having examined the methodological assumptions and research methods of this project the next chapter discusses issues of gender power that have emerged from observing and talking to exercisers at the fitness gym.

CHAPTER 5

The 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex':

Gender-Power Relations and Established-Outsider Theory

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 3 focused on gender, sport and power relations and highlighted that bodies are products and producers of power, knowledge and shifting political investments. The overlapping themes, issues and concepts that might underpin a feminist figural approach to understanding gender relations in sport and exercise contexts were examined in Chapters 1, 2 and 4. The aim here is to reflect on and exemplify issues about gender-power that have arisen from my observations and interviews in the health and fitness gym.

The chapter examines the ways in which Elias's ideas about power might shed light on questions of femininity, the body and exercise. I also draw on the work of some feminist scholars as I explore what counts in terms of female body ideals in the fitness gym. In doing so, I seek to examine further some of the overlaps and differences between feminisms and figural sociology. The conceptualisation of power introduced in Chapter 2 forms the basis of this evaluation. I begin by outlining the ambiguities and contradictions in female body image that I have observed. Elias's ideas are harnessed in explaining the relative capacities of exercisers to control corporeal ideals of femininity. In terms of understanding further the effects of interdependence, power and femininity, the discussion then draws on Elias and Scotson's (1994) observations introduced in Chapter 2.

Propositions about established-outsider relations are used in identifying particular power dynamics at work in the micro-context of exercise that serve to differentiate between some higher status and lower status women. The monopolization of knowledge about the body, and the mutual identification with, and self-restraint towards, established I/We images of femininity, are some of the

processes by which established-outsider relations are produced and reproduced. Gossip networks, and the mechanisms of group charisma, and group disgrace, also have a significant impact on gender-power relations in the fitness gym. Broader established-outsider relations at work between and within groups of women and men in society are also reflected in the thoughts, actions and emotions of the women interviewed. The next section explores the images of idealised female bodies that I have observed in the gym environment.

5.1 Images of Femininity in the Health and Fitness Club

Popular images of femininity are mediated through bodily representations of slenderness, tight muscles and the appearance of health and fitness. In (western) fashion magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Marie-Claire, Glamour and Now, as well as fitness focused publications such as Health and Fitness, Shape, Zest and Men's Health, the recurring ideals are of slim, tight female bodies. Such images were also reflected in the organisation and practices of the health and fitness gym where I conducted this research. Popular women's and men's fitness magazines littered the waiting areas, putting perfect bodies on display and perpetually sensitising people to specific bodily ideals. My interviews and observations highlighted that women's awareness of their own (im)perfections was also sharpened by the reflections of bodies in the mirrored walls of the gym and dance studio, by constant surveillance of bodies working-out, and by specific exercise regimes.

At first sight, my observations support the corpus of feminist scholarship that identifies exercise as part of a repertoire of oppressive regimes used by women to change their bodies to mirror narrowly defined images of female beauty (Bartky, 1988; Benson, 1997; Bordo, 1990, 1993; Carlisle-Duncan, 1994; Chernin, 1981; Cole, 1993; Wolf, 1991). Exercise, dieting, hair removal, cosmetics, fashion and cosmetic surgery are explained by these writers in terms of their purpose for altering female bodies in conformity to a singular feminine bodily ideal that is thin. But on closer

inspection, the evidence in this study reveals variations in the apparently singular media representation of idealised femininity. I argue that the feminine body ideal is not solely exemplified by waif-like images of the catwalk (Kate Moss, Karen Olsen, Jodie Kidd and more recently Lily Cole) or the more curvy bodies of fashion and film (Cindy Crawford and Catherine Zeta-Jones). Images of the female body-beautiful are rather more varied. Like Markula's (1995, p. 428) study of the "aerobicizing body", I have identified some corporeal paradoxes in what counts as a feminine body ideal in the fitness gym. Beth's comments clearly identify the variations and ambiguities in the ideal female body. "The ideal shape ?" she questioned. "Very tall and very lean but not big Muscular but smaller and thinnera bit of definition but leaner". Fiona also explained that idealised femininity was represented in "strong looking and powerful" female bodies that were also "very slim". She concluded that Darcy Bussell (ballet) and Sigourney Weaver and Cameron Diaz (film) epitomised feminine beauty.

Lean (little fat), muscularly tight (toned) and shapely female bodies exemplify images of health and fitness. Such corporeal ideals are complex and contradictory. In the fitness gym environment the ideal female body is not uni-dimensionally ascribed. Rather, what counts as acceptable in terms of female bodies is negotiated and defined in several ways (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Markula, 1995; Sassatelli, 1998). Let me make some preliminary comments about such corporeal complexities prior to explaining the processes by which these images have come to prevail in the health and fitness gym.

5.2 "I want to be lean no spare fleshfat free" (Beth)

One of the requirements of the ideal female body is for a lean physique. The women I spoke with expressed a specific dislike of body fat. Their exercise and dietary habits focused on reducing and removing excess fat from their bodies. Charlie explicitly stated; "fat bothers me". In our lengthy discussions about body shape and size she identified fat as unattractive and leanness as sexually appealing. Fiona also

illustrated that being thin was a dominant aspect of the female beauty ideal saying, “most women I know are wrapped up in the thin thing ... (the ideal is) to be as slim as possible without being skinny”

These women's comments reflect the promotion of exercise in terms of the potential for 'burning' body fat. Exercise is a means of constructing the slim ideal of female beauty. Fiona expressed this point quite clearly saying, “ I am not naturally skinny Exercise helps to keep your weight (fat) down”. The ideology of thinness was reflected in several ways in the fitness gym. For example, posters advertising exercise classes promised fat reduction through aerobic type exercise. Exercise of a moderate – low intensity for relatively long durations was promoted in the range of exercise classes available at the gym. Exercise to music classes promised a 'slim healthy body', 'moves to lose the fat', and 'fat-burner work-outs'. Reinforcing the principles of exercise prescription and promotion advocated by the community of sport scientists and health and fitness professionals, the rationale for specific exercise classes emphasised the need for reducing, trimming and slimming the female body. This is not to say that men were not encouraged to lose fat and tighten their muscles. On the walls of the gym, instruction boards provided advice for all gym members about the correct type, frequency and intensity of exercise for eliminating fatty excesses. Diet information focusing on fat reduction was also on display. Men as well as women participated in organised exercise classes. More usually, however, it was women who attended exercise classes that were set to music, choreographed, and that promised the elimination of fat. Men tended to participate in classes that emphasised muscular strength and endurance such as circuit training, martial arts, and boxing type activities.

The ideology of fat reduction that suffused the exercise behaviours of the women in this study was also reflected in the way in which exercise is represented to females in the media. Several authors highlight that magazines promoting idealised

female bodies explicitly identify the need to look slim, slender or thin (Carlisle-Duncan, 1994; Benson, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994; Markula, 1995). Women's experience of exercise in this study, lends some support to the idea of a female obsession with achieving a slender body regardless of the biological potential and limits of their bodies (Kissling, 1991; Bordo, 1990, 1993; Chernin, 1981; Woolf, 1991). While fat may be a "fella's issue" (Thomas, 1996) as well as a female one, a narcissistic preoccupation with the eradicating body fat was certainly evident in my observations and interviews. All of the women I spoke with were unhappy if their bodies looked or felt fat. They chose exercises and work-out regimes that they knew would 'burn fat'. They had come to know through personal experience, and through the dominant ideology of exercise and dieting, that jogging, running, walking and cycling, in fact any exercise "that uses large muscle groups, that can be maintained for a prolonged period, and is rhythmic and aerobic in nature" (American College of Sport Medicine [ACSM], 1991p. 95) had the potential to burn fat and reduce the size of their bodies.

Ideals of female thinness served to reinforce the low fat, slender body as a powerful image of femininity for the women interviewed. At the fitness gym, the promotion of exercise was underpinned by a desire for weight (fat) loss. The media also represent thinness as a dominant female body image. Yet there was another requirement for the female beauty ideal. What seemed to be increasingly desirable was tight, firm muscles.

5.3 "I want to have muscles but not like bloke proportions" (Dina)

All of the women I interviewed aspired to achieve and / or maintain a slender appearance. They also identified that toned and shapely muscles were important in terms of the female body ideal. A focus on developing muscles can be thought of in terms of broadening definitions of femininity. It is not necessarily the waif-like, passive image of femininity that is condoned by gym users. Rather, there is an

acceptance that muscles too are part of the requirement for the female body-beautiful.

Anna explained that "I'd love to look like Sharon Davies Or Anna Kournikova and Steffi Graf [they] have good bodies ... good figures ...[it is] the athlete figure that is much nicer ... the more muscular ones". Several of the women identified Denise Lewis (heptathlon) as having an ideal body shape and one that was "fit and defined and strong and tight" (Fiona). Dina explained, "Denise Lewis ... that's the ideal shape I'd like to look like. She is tighter [than me] and strong". Yet there are tensions in the development of muscles for these women.

Dina introduced me to such tensions by saying, "Getting more muscly is what I am looking forward to ... I've got strength, power and definition. I was afraid first that I was going to get too big". When I asked what she feared from muscular size she said "Mm ... going up a dress size ... it's difficult [to explain]. I want a more muscular body so long as I don't get too big ... like bloke proportions... so long as I wasn't like Fatima Whitbread". These women do not want to look like men. They fear being perceived as unfeminine in any way. For them, muscular bulk is not acceptable in the construction of feminine body ideals.

Among some women in the fitness gym, a specific muscular shape and size is desirable in the idealised image of femininity. Female muscles must be tight but soft looking and small, rather than bulky, hard and big. Dina continued with her comments about Denise Lewis in advocating the 'right' shape and size for female muscles. "I thought she [Denise Lewis] was big ... [when I saw her] she is tiny ...her waist is smaller than mine ... tiny ...her legs were muscly but not much bigger than mine". Fiona also emphasised that "I think that muscles are nice. I think that toned fitness is nice but when it gets to male proportions like when you don't have much of a bust and it has turned too muscular and ... [you get] too developed [muscly] ... and you take away the roundness of a woman ... [then] I think that's sort of not feminine".

She concluded that what was important in terms of the ideal female body was “ to be fit ... and keep [my] femininity rather than being too muscly” (Fiona).

‘Common-sense’ and scientific conceptions of female physicality might contend that female hormones restrict the development of muscles in women who engage in sport and exercise. Such a contention illustrates one of the ways in which women’s physical capabilities can be reduced to biological facts by some agents who are relatively powerful in terms of defining what counts as acceptably feminine. (Hargreaves, 1994). Yet there is much sociological, sporting and medical evidence illustrating that some women are capable of lifting relatively heavy weights and building apparently large muscles (Balsamo, 1994; Bolin, 1992a, 1992b; Ireland & Nattiv, 2002; Heywood, 1988). The way that the women I have spoken with countered any possibility of acquiring large bulky muscles was to exercise “correctly” (Anna and Dina) and to restrict their calorie intake. In terms of exercise, Anna illustrated the need to adopt some regimes over others as a means of achieving desirable muscular appearance. She said “it’s awful if you do weights and you bulk ...you can feel your legs tightening. For cellulite and fatit’s (weight training) OK because ... you are fat burning but oh god it’s the big legs (she shakes her head) ... so I stick to more walking [which] I know works”. Anna highlights that specific exercise practices are appropriate in achieving the ideals of slimness *and* muscular tightness. As she explained, “you cannot do weights too hard [too heavy] ...when you want definition not bulk ” (Anna).

My observations revealed that, in the fitness gym and the dance studio particular exercises are prescribed for shaping and toning muscles. In the choreographed exercise classes such as aerobics and step-aerobics, these muscle-shaping regimes are described variously as ‘floor work’ or ‘bums and tums’ or ‘toning’. They take place on mats on the floor at the end of the session. In the gym these exercises were described as ‘floor work’ or ‘abdominals’ (‘abs’) if performed on

the dedicated section of mats, or 'weights', if weight machines or 'free' weights were used in the shaping exercises. Whatever they are called, such exercises are fundamental to sculpting ideals of muscular shape and tone.

The rationale for performing shaping exercises for arms, stomach, legs, chest and bottom is to develop tightness in, and improve the shape of, specific muscles or muscle groups. The women I have spoken with assign a particular meaning to these exercises. They perform them for the sake of their bodily appearance (Markula, 1995). They have learned that, if practised regularly and with appropriate technique, these cosmetic exercises will help them to sculpt their muscles into the firm, sleek shape that is such an important part of the female body-beautiful. Female body ideals of slimness and muscularity, explained above, are conflated with ideals of health and fitness. I introduce the 'fit' body as another requirement for the female physique in the fitness gym and identify some further contradictions in terms what counts as the ideal female body.

5.4 "Exercise for health? Fitness? Who cares? I just want to look good"(Helen)

It is widely recognised that engaging in physical activity, of a specific type, frequency and intensity is good for your health (ACSM, 1991; Bouchard et al., 1990; Department of Health [DOH], 1999, 2001). More specifically, physical activity is prescribed and promoted as a way to improve the 'fitness' (function) of the cardiovascular system (heart and lungs). Physical activity is also championed as a contributory factor in weight (fat) loss. Such claims to health and fitness are evidenced in the fitness gym. I have observed that 'fit' bodies were not only slim and toned, but they also had a relatively high capacity for exercise, as well as a mastery of exercise technique. Exercise was promoted in terms of the 'look good and feel great' ideal that suffuses the messages and images of the commercial health and fitness industry.

Following Waddington (2000, p.11) "few ideas ...are as widely and uncritically accepted as that linking sport and exercise with good health". The idea that physical activity is integral to a healthy lifestyle has a long history. A contemporary focus on the importance of physical activity to health and well-being is reinforced in several government health policy documents, national surveys and scientific papers (see for example, Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey [ADNFS], 1992; DOH, 1999; National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease [NSFCHD], 2000; National Quality Assurance Framework for Exercise Referrals [NQAFER], 2001). Personnel involved in the fitness industry tend to reinforce the health-promoting potential of exercise. Yet, I have observed inconsistent and contradictory aspects of the health and fitness benefits of working-out at the gym or in the dance studio. My observations call into question the assumed positive relationship between exercise, health and fitness. As Waddington (2000) emphasises, there may be some health costs associated with sport and exercise. Some examples will illustrate what I mean.

Anna wanted to look 'fit' but she, like other women in the study, equated 'fitness' with the outward appearance of the body, rather than the inward capacity of her internal physiology. She was explicit about this when she said, "I don't go for fitness ...like health at all I do it to try and keep the weight (fat) offto look fit" (Anna). In an informal conversation with a group of women, another respondent, Helen, reinforced Anna's ideas saying "I kid myself about the health thing. I think it's [exercise] making me healthy and fit ... it probably is ...but I don't care ... I want the body". These comments illustrate the way in which exercise practices construct a kind of "cosmetic fitness" (Coakley, 2001, p.208). Female fitness is represented, to some degree, in contemporary images of athletic, powerful women. Yet, fashion images emphasising thinness, muscular tone and soft curvy female bodies underpin the dominant requirement for a 'fit' look; one that can be cosmetically achieved through exercise, diet, make-up, make-overs and surgery. There seems to be some

contradiction in relation to the regulation of the interior environment of the body and the management and representation of the exterior body (Turner, 1996, p. 108; Williams & Bendelow; 1998, p. 45). These are key features of contemporary corporeality (Featherstone, 1982, 1991). What some of the women in this study highlight is that a relatively high premium is placed on *looking* 'fit' rather than *being* 'fit'.

A further illustration of the division between a healthy interior body and a 'fit' exterior body is my observation that along with exercise, some women engaged in weight control strategies such as vomiting, binges and starvation diets. Charlie, for example emphatically stated that "I *have* to do exercise (her emphasis)... I push myself to do it. If I don't eat as well, and I exercise hard... I think that's a bonus". In one interview she talked at length about her tendency towards bulimic behaviour. She described her relationship with food and exercise as "horrendous". Asked to explain further what she meant she said "everything I do is planned around exercise and eating ... sometimes I make myself sick if I've eaten too much or not exercised enough ... it all revolves around the same thing ... the body thing ... losing the fat".

So we see another contradiction in the requirements for female bodies. Messages from the scientific community of sports scientists, health and fitness experts and medical professionals focus on physical activity for health. But commercial messages are founded on the assumption that it is what you look like, rather than what and how your body performs, that counts in terms of female attractiveness. It seems that, those involved in the fitness industry conflate ideas about fitness, beauty and health as a way of effectively promoting exercise for commercial profits (Waddington, 2000). Arguably, the representation of the feminine self (and sometimes the masculine self) in the context of contemporary health and fitness settings is dependent on exterior style and fashion rather than on interior, physiological, capability of the body (Turner, 1996, p. 122). There are health and

fitness gains to be made from exercise. Yet on closer inspection, the rationale for exercise that is founded on cosmetic 'fitness' can also jeopardise rather than improve people's health. Several of my interviewees reported that the extent to which they exercised and dieted had at times interrupted their normal menstrual cycle (Dina, Charlie, Fiona, Grace and Beth). In addition, Anna explained that when she had achieved the weight (fat) loss she had wished for, her hair started falling out. Looking 'fit' then, does not necessarily equate with good health. In fact, incidents of poor health characterised the exercise behaviours of some of those women who desired the 'fitness' ideals of slimness and muscular tone.

What marks out dominant aspirations for idealised femininity, at least in terms of the women in this study, is a desire for slimness, muscular tightness (tone) and, the appearance of fitness. Some relatively early studies explain exercise practices, such as aerobics, in terms of the promotion of a double image of femininity (MacNeill, 1988; Kenen, 1987). In such studies, aerobics is used as a means to reconstruct traditionally feminine body ideals of slender-softness, as well as promoting a strong, muscular look that challenges the more stereotypical image. The findings of this research indicate that through the practice of working-out, women seek to achieve a mix of 'fitness', thinness and tightness in their bodies (Kenen, 1987; Kagan & Morse, 1988; Markula, 1995). My observations identify that female bodies in the fitness gym incorporate a slender, toned femininity that is more complex than a double image.

Some feminist authors have explored the complexities in the production and reproduction of idealised femininity that I have observed. Bartky (1990), for example, argues that body management regimes like exercise and dieting and the associated fashion-model look are characterised by duplicity. What Bartky (1990) means is, women aspire to the ideals of fashion that are impossible for most of them to achieve because of the constraints of their biological endowments. In addition, feminine

bodily discipline is duplicitous because the public image and pursuit of beauty masks private tensions, anxieties and disempowerment in those who cannot achieve the body-beautiful (Carlisle-Duncan, 1994). Bordo (1990) argues further that thinness is not the only component of ideal female beauty. She explains the new requirement of femininity in terms of a paradoxical body that looks simultaneously “spare minimalist” and “solid, muscular, athletic” (Bordo, 1990, p. 90). The findings of this research support such an idea.

Different ideas about femininity can be represented at the same time in one body. The acceptance and display of female muscles symbolises strength and control and runs counter to traditional notions of feminine frailty and passivity. Yet, ideals associated with petite, thin, slender or slim female bodies reinforce the stereotypes of female passivity and weakness. As Markula (1995, p. 427) suggests, such an image of female bodies “simultaneously expands and limits the notions of femininity”. The feminist authors I cite identify contradictions in female beauty ideals and offer some explanations for such bodily complexities. Elias’s ideas are of use in furthering an understanding of the ambiguous character of female body ideals in the fitness and health setting. Let me explain why this is so by considering how the complex ideals of slim, tight and muscular femininity have come to dominate the fitness gym.

What is principally at issue in understanding the predominance of particular images of femininity in the fitness gym, is the relative capacities of female and male exercisers to ‘control’ ideals of female body image. Bodies are central to the balance of gender-power in the context of the health and fitness club. They represent a symbolic resource in the production and reproduction of gendered identities. In other words, the exercise behaviours of fitness gym users, and the appearance of their bodies, are the foundation for defining femininity and masculinity. In terms of exercise figurations, I argue that a complex of idealised female body images has developed in

relation to unequal power ratios, between and within groups of men and women, in the quest to define what counts as the body-beautiful.

What counts in terms of female bodies can be explained by exploring some of the interdependencies between and within groups of women and men at the gym. As previously outlined, ideal female bodies have relatively little fat and are muscularly toned. They also demonstrate a mastery of exercise and represent, at least to some extent, ideals of health and fitness. People with lean, toned bodies who demonstrate a high capacity for exercise are described as “looking good” and “fit”. (Beth, Ruth, Fiona). They hold a privileged, high status position in the gym. In the micro context of exercise, some people have a greater capability than some others in defining what counts as acceptable female appearance. In other words, particular power ratios between people at the fitness gym serve to construct and reconstruct female body ideals. One example is the balance of power between instructors and clients. I consider this in next section.

5.5 Idealised Female Bodies and the Instructor / Client Relationship

As a model for the relationships I have observed between instructors and clients in the fitness gym, Elias's (1998b) two-person game model is of use. A particular example of two-person gender games at work is the often-observed relationship between a fitness instructor and a new client. Such a relationship represents one between a specialist (fitness instructor, fitness expert or personal trainer) and a non-specialist (client). Considering how, and to what extent, instructors and clients were bonded to each other seemed to me to be one way of understanding the production and reproduction of preferred images of femininity in the gym.

Observing instructor / client relationships and listening to their dialogues revealed that the instructor had a relatively high degree of control over the client in terms of the exercise behaviour of the latter. There is a particular power relationship between specialist and non-specialist that develops by virtue of the “functional

interdependence" between them (Elias, 1998b, p. 116). My interviews and observations revealed that the instructors' primary role is to teach people the correct use of equipment, the purpose for which particular exercises are intended, and the appropriate frequency, duration and intensity of activity for achieving particular performance and appearance objectives. Instructors also act as monitors in the gym checking that people are exercising in the right way to achieve a 'good' or 'fit' body. Fitness instructors are constantly vigilant of exercise behaviours and correct mistakes in bodily performance. One consequence of the instructor / client relationship is an uneven power ratio. Clients tended to be more dependent on instructors for acquiring body knowledge and structuring their exercise behaviours.

In terms of the female clients at the gym, not all were equally dependent on instructors. However, new female exercisers who had not yet learned correct exercise techniques, and who did not meet established appearance criteria, represented the least knowledgeable group of clients. They were most dependent on fitness experts for their body and exercise knowledge. In the fitness gym, there is a hierarchy of those who know how to achieve female body ideals. Along with instructors, established participants, both female and male, held the tacit knowledge needed to achieve established markers of successful performance and appearance. In other words, at the top of the hierarchy of body-knowledge were those who looked good and demonstrated their superior knowledge and ability in executing particular exercise techniques. Specialist body knowledge signified instructor status.

In the specialist / non-specialist relationship, the instructor would write down a schedule of exercise for the uninitiated client. The rules of the work-out were logged in a personal exercise programme that was reviewed over time, and amended according to the corporeal progress being made. In these relationships, instructors have a relatively high "capacity to compel" clients to work-out according to dominant body ideals (Elias, 1998b, p.122). Instructors were consistent in advocating

cardiovascular type exercise such as walking, jogging, rowing, cycling and stepping for twenty minutes, three times per week, as a way to improve the efficiency of the heart and lungs and achieve weight (fat) loss. Such advice also reflects accepted guidelines and professional conduct in exercise testing and prescription advocated by experts in the field of exercise programming (ACSM, 1991). Furthermore, muscular toning activities, including the use of light weights were suggested as a way of sculpting the lean, lithe, muscularly tight appearance desired by the women I observed.

Female clients were not encouraged to lift heavy weights in their exercise programmes. There was a notable absence of females in the 'free' weight room at the fitness gym. Attached to and accessed through the main gym, the 'free weight' room was equipped exclusively with an extensive range of relatively heavy weights, bars, dumbbells and benches. This area was dedicated to weight lifting and was predominantly used by men. The rationale for lifting heavy weights is to build muscular strength and size. But female muscles are required to be tight and shapely, not big and bulky. As previously noted, the prescription and use of weights in women's exercise practices emphasise muscular toning. Both Fiona and Anna informed me that female clients were not "inducted" into (introduced into the use of) 'free' weights at all. Such an observation indicates that instructors could withhold information about certain types of exercise from clients. It can be said then that instructors had a relatively high constraining power over the practice of exercise for some of the women at the gym. Given that the balance of power tended to favour instructors in the instructor / client relationship, it can also be said that instructors had a relatively high capacity to control the production and reproduction of idealised notions of the female body-beautiful through the prescription of some selected types of exercise. Exercise regimes such as lifting heavy weights have the potential for broadening or transgressing female body ideals (Bolin, 1992a, 1992b). Yet, most of

the women I observed using weight training machines never attempted weights that required a visible physical effort. Most women exercisers did not lift weights that would cause them to breath vigorously and loudly, or to grunt or shout, with the effort required. These women did not lift heavy weights. They were not encouraged to use, and avoided, the 'free' weight room.

The popular conception amongst those who work-out is that if women lift heavy weights they will develop big, bulky muscles considered to be characteristically unfeminine. Given this, the lifting of relatively heavy weights was excluded from, or at least remained at the margins of their work-outs. More usually, women gym users conducted weight-training activities for the purpose of sculpting small, tight muscles. The instructor / client relationship previously described supports the observation that instructors have a relatively high degree of control over the overall network of processes that shape the gendered rules of gym culture. To some extent, the fitness gym is characterised by a culture of femininity (and masculinity) founded on the status of idealised female (and male) bodies. It appears that instructors and established participants spread particular messages about what counts as acceptably feminine and masculine. Moreover, instructors teach techniques for achieving preferred body ideals. So, they keep in motion a set of corporeal rules that permeate the actions and emotions of those who work-out.

So far, I have demonstrated that the relatively large power ratio between specialist (instructor) and non-specialist (client) provides those 'who know' about the body with a relatively high capacity to 'control' ideals of the female body. But instructors do not have an unlimited "capacity to compel" female clients to use exercise as a means of acquiring an idealised physique (Elias, 1998b, p. 122). What Elias's models have enabled me to see is that instructor / client relationships are reciprocal, yet unequal, ones. The superiority of an instructor over a client is never total, and does not remain constant. This is an important observation in terms of

understanding the development of, and complexities in female body image in the fitness gym. Let me explain why using a specific example.

5.6 Female Body Ideals and Body Knowledge: Ambiguities and Contradictions

Thinking once again about instructors and clients, I observed that the process of regularly working-out enables clients to learn about exercise techniques for management of the interior and exterior body. For example, Anna explained that until she had started her fitness regime, her knowledge about exercise for body sculpting had been rudimentary. She stated that "I know some people say you only need to walk to burn fat, but to slim down and really get in shape it's got to be more and people here [at the gym] have shown me that". Eva also noted how she learned ways of achieving the 'look' she desired from instruction by the experts when she said "I like to be told by someone better than me ... that's how I know how to get in shape ... I'd love to have a personal trainer ideally .. to push me ... to train harder ... to get the body". In the quest for the body-beautiful, then, tacit knowledge is gained by observing, talking to and taking advice from fitness experts at the gym. But such examples also demonstrate that, as the work-out regimes of the relatively inexperienced clients turn their bodily aspirations into reality, the power differential between instructor and client decreases.

In one informal conversation Anna exclaimed "Look I can run harder and my hips and bottom are slimmer and my muscles are a nicer shape ... I started the running and now I do weights properly and I am stronger but not bigger ... I am more defined." Her comments exemplify that the power of relatively inferior exercise participants can increase through improvements in fitness, performance and physique. This issue is explored in a discussion of established-outsider relations further on in the chapter. Here, my example is meant to highlight that the distribution of power between clients and fitness experts can, and does, change.

In Anna's case, her knowledge, appearance and performance had equipped her with the corporeal resources to become an instructor. She was, in fact, involved in managing other instructors. Under these conditions, the power that some instructors had previously possessed had diminished in terms of Anna's exercise behaviours. At the same time, Anna's chance of exerting influence over the physical activities of clients had increased. She was now involved in processes of advocating exercise techniques for sculpting the female body-beautiful. In addition, and by virtue of her new corporeal status, Anna's power over other 'fitness experts' at the gym had also increased. What begins to become clear by following Elias's thinking is that, in situations where there the power difference between clients and instructors in the fitness gym is decreasing, the production and reproduction of female body ideals becomes less reflective of the planned actions of relatively powerful individuals such as fitness instructors. Rather, the construction of idealised femininity is founded on some more complex multi-person gender games as well as the simple two-person gender game outlined so far. Examples from my observations can illustrate this point.

Some instructors (fitness experts or personal trainers) had a relatively high degree of control over the individual exercise behaviours of some female clients and concomitantly over the pattern of feminine body ideals at the gym. But instructors could not directly affect all people who work-out. Their power to define a particular body image is not total. Here, Elias's way of thinking has helped me to understand two particular observations I have made during the course of my research. The first is that some women do not slavishly adhere to the slim, petite and toned ideals of female beauty. Rather, they advocate and aspire to develop strong, powerful muscles. The second observation relates to the fitness class and gym where some women displayed bodies that were fat rather than slim and petite.

Let me consider the development of strong, powerful muscles in some female gym users. While new clients were not encouraged by instructors to use the

equipment in the 'free' weights room, this did not mean that the area was an exclusively male space. Dina, for example, conducted weight-training sessions for the purpose of building power, strength and speed. While she worked-out at the fitness gym where this study was conducted, she engaged a trainer who was external to the setting. She was involved in weight lifting techniques not prescribed by the in-house personnel. This observation reflects the idea that fitness experts can be disadvantaged in terms of controlling ideals of the female body because they cannot influence all gym users. Dina's outside fitness expert was, more specifically, her javelin coach. Dina's work-out regimes were influenced by the need to develop power, strength and technique for throwing the javelin. Her bodily ideals incorporated aspects of female strength and power not necessarily expressed by the instructors at the gym. Advocating that "more women should get into weights", she explained that she thought muscular women could look good "if they [the muscles] are defined". Fiona also noted, "women should be able to build big muscles," exclaiming "Why shouldn't a woman be muscly? It can look good, too. I kind of admire it". And Anna highlighted how she and others could provide an alternative influence in terms of what counts as acceptable female exercise behaviour by saying "I've got Stacey into the weights, just like Vicky did for me. I showed her some free weights routines. She was a bit fearful because she thought she'd get massive. But I showed her what I can do and I am not big".

Another situation of shifting power ratios concerns the display of fat bodies by some women at the gym. The fitness gym and dance studio were not exclusively given over to slim, tight women. Nor was it not only those with lean, toned physiques that wore revealing tight clothing. People of all bodily shapes and sizes worked-out. I observed on several occasions a young woman in her early twenties conducting a prescribed programme of exercise. I estimated her at about 5 feet tall and weighing about 11 stone. She wore a cropped vest and loose shorts revealing rolls of fat

around her midriff and thighs. She carried written details of her regime on the regulation 'progress card' and noted the completion of each particular exercise. There were some regular participants at the fitness classes who also did not match the criteria for idealised female bodies. While I will argue later in the chapter that such women represent part of an 'outsider' group of exercisers, they were nonetheless committed to the exercise regime. Sometimes, fat bodies, rather than fit bodies are on display in the gym and dance studio. Those people adhering to the ideals of slimness and tone hold a relatively high degree of power over those who do not in terms of defining bodily appearance. Yet, the participation in exercise by those who do not display more acceptable ideals of the female body-beautiful represents a degree of resistance to idealised images of the female body.

It is important to consider here the extent to which oppositional corporeal power tactics can exert influence over the production and reproduction of female body ideals. Consider again those women who were concerned with developing muscular strength and power rather than simply sculpting a particular shape and tone in their muscles. There seemed to be a relatively high potential for this small opposing group to exert some influence over what counts as the acceptable female body at the gym. One of the reasons for this is that there was evidence of a few tensions between weight training women over just what was acceptable in terms of female strength and muscular power. These women did not wish to develop extreme muscular size such as that displayed by female body builders. As Dina noted: "you can have bigger muscles and develop muscular strength and power without being massive and still be feminine". Those women who I did observe lifting heavy free weights were strong. They looked powerful. Whilst their muscles were bigger than those women who only engaged in cosmetic muscular shaping, they were not bulky or extreme in terms of size. The limits of female muscular development were expressed explicitly by Fiona and Dina who said "you don't want to look like a

gladiator ... or a body builder ... that's too muscled" (Fiona) and "I want to have muscles but not like bloke proportions" (Dina).

Weight training women seem to have some potential to expand the limits of acceptable femininity. On the other hand, there is a relatively low potential for fat women to exert an influence over what counts as the acceptable female body at the gym. One reason for this was the existence of several tensions regarding the acceptance of body fat. Some women wanted to advocate fat as oppositional to preferred images of slimness and tone. Fiona, for example, knew of larger women who wanted to work-out. She wanted to encourage them to participate at the fitness gym. But she explained that "larger ladies" were intimidated by the culture of slimness. Indeed, at the same time as she offered support to those who were overweight she noted that she would advise them to work-out at "less busy times ... times when the fit and gorgeous people are not in". Her comments are contradictory and reflect her own anxieties about body fat. On one hand, Fiona presents an altruistic view that is accepting of any women at the gym, regardless of their body size and shape. Yet, on the other hand, her opinions reflect the idea that fat bodies are outsider bodies. In advising fat, unfit women to work-out at times when they do not have to observe, or be observed by, established, fit exercisers, who have acquired the correct 'look', she tends to reinforce the cultural distaste of fat at the fitness gym. Charlie's comments also reflected the culture of thinness evident in my observations when she said "fat is yuck and horrible ... not attractive .. you need to be slim". And, as Helen stated, "you just don't want to be fat". There was a considerable amount of disagreement about the acceptability of fat. Anxiety, shame and embarrassment surrounded the imagery and appearance of female bodies that are fat. I explore these issues later in this chapter and in chapter 6. My intention here is to highlight that some oppositional body images can exert more influence over the production and reproduction of female body ideals than others.

These examples are meant to show how some individuals in the specific context of a health and fitness gym contribute to notions of idealised femininity. Some women adhere to idealised notions of female thinness. But the female body-beautiful is also required to have muscles that are tight and shapely. The fitness gym provides an environment in which some women can sculpt a look that is simultaneously lean and toned. This is the image of health and fitness that characterises the organisation, prescription and practice of contemporary fitness activities. Yet, some other women choose to engage in practices that do not exactly conform to the accepted range of feminine exercise behaviours prescribed by the fitness instructors I have observed. In the fitness gym, there are representations of female body image that do not strictly reinforce the slim, toned, petite model of femininity.

Expressions of female strength and power illustrate the potential of some exercise regimes in *broadening* ideals of the female body-beautiful. Women who display fat, arguably challenge dominant images of lean and tight female bodies and illustrate the idea that no one person or group is all-powerful in defining femininity. Such women are saying perhaps, that personality is more important than looks and are, thus, challenging the currently dominant narcissistic norm. While the slim, shapely and toned female body may be seen as relatively superior in the fitness gym, and in a broader social context, it is not the only image that counts as feminine. Many people, in the health and fitness context influence the establishment of preferred images of the female body-beautiful. As the complexity of social interactions inside and outside the gym increases, there is growing uncertainty about what counts as the ideal female body. Thus, as I have observed, female body ideals are complex, ambiguous and contradictory. Such complexities are produced *ceteris paribus* and reproduced by shifting power relations between gym users.

5.7 Bodies, S(exercise), and Looking Good

The previous sections have illustrated some of the bonds between instructors and clients that influence the construction and reconstruction of female body ideals. Yet, I have observed some other types of relationships that clarify further the production of idealised female bodies. In seeking to shape their bodies in accordance with preferred images of femininity, it was evident that the relations between women and men at the fitness gym are characterised by a fundamental interdependence that is both “bio-psychological” and “socio-cultural” (Dunning, 1999, p. 227). The following examples illustrate this argument.

Women and men who work-out want to look attractive to other people. There is a physical and emotional need attached to sculpting the body-beautiful. In one interview, Dina explained that at the gym and also in other sporting contexts ‘fit’ bodies were (hetero) sexually attractive. She said that in sport and exercise settings people “show off” or “strut” their bodies in what she called “sexy displays”. When I probed her on the issue of sexual attractiveness she added: “it [being attractive to men] is all about how your body is and it has to be toned and fit”. So, Dina's comments illustrate a need to shape the body towards a heterosexually feminine body image. Working-out in gym, and in other sporting activities, provided Dina with the opportunity to fulfill such a need.

Some women and men need their physical bodies to be attractive to the opposite sex, perhaps implying that females and males are interdependent because they need each other to reproduce the population (Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Dunning, 1999). As will be shown later in this section, it is also the case that some exercisers may wish to be physically attractive to the same sex. For some, there is a voyeuristic and sexual type of pleasure in looking at bodies of the opposite sex. Listening to casual conversations between people, it became evident that people who work-out are not only concerned with their own personal body image but are often

focused on the way others look. For example, in the ladies' changing room, women would often discuss with others particular male participants who matched idealised notions of masculinity. Strong, lean, rugged men were described as looking 'sexy' and 'fit'. Indeed, some voiced their fantasies about sexual encounters with these men. To some extent, some men are objectified and sexualised by women at the fitness gym. For example, one woman was heard talking to another about one of the male participants at the gym. As they showered and changed after a work-out she said "He's really fit. I wouldn't mind half an hour in the bedroom with him!". Her friend responded; "(you'd) better get in the gym then ... if you want to look good". This reply implied that the work-out regime was a way to construct the body that would be reciprocally attractive to the kind of male bodies some women desire. This example demonstrates that some women's exercise habits are relatively dependent on the attention of men. At the same time, some men are more dependent on their association with women who match their ideals of the female body-beautiful to sustain their own sense of heterosexual masculinity. For example, I observed and heard men admiring idealised female bodies that were mediated on MTV (music television) or in commercial fitness magazines.

As well as the evidence for heterosexual attraction, some women and men at the fitness gym wished to be attractive to the same sex. Charlie, for example noted that "I think it's [exercise and diet] for yourself to look good so you feel better but what I really think deep down is that you want to look better for other people both men and women". Several other interviewees explained that they felt a need for other women to consider them attractive. Beth, for example stated "it's important if other women think you look good. I mean you do compete in a way". Eva explained that her body management regimes were part of her need to feel "sexy" and be considered as "sexy" by her (male) partner. But she also managed her body so other women would

consider her attractive. She explained the importance of “looking good” for other women in the following way:

Well, you see I went to a big ball in London last week and because I have been exercising I could get into a dress that I had and I kind of knew that compared to the other women I looked good. Well not that they did not look good but I felt confident that no one would be saying anything against me. I mean I had a tan and I was slim in the dress and yeah it was good (Eva).

This example demonstrates that some individual women are more dependent on other individual women to bolster their sense of femininity. The women I spoke with spoke of current and previous boyfriends, fiancés or husbands. Their conversations with me indicated that they were all heterosexual. But the findings of this research indicate that some women and men need to look good to both the same and the opposite sex because, as will be discussed further in the next chapter, idealised images of female and male bodies are status enhancing. Identifying with, and identifiable as looking ‘good’ or ‘fit’, whatever one’s gender or sexual preference, offers opportunities for physical and emotional security, self-development and happiness.

5.8 The Fitness Club, Femininities and Rules of Corporeality

Another way of explaining the complexity of exercise behaviours that I have observed is to draw on Elias and Dunning's (1986, p. 100) insights into the “‘sphere-bound’” nature of norms and values. In the gym, people follow certain bodily norms that might be different and even contradictory to codes of conduct in other spheres of life. For example, at the gym, the norms that construct a repugnance to vigorous heavy breathing and sweating bodies, and produce a modesty surrounding bare flesh are suspended. Using Elias and Dunning (1986) it becomes clear that gym culture is marked by rules appropriate to work-out activities.

Following Elias and Dunning (1986, p. 102), "game rule" types of norms develop in the context of the gym. What I mean is that corporeal rules of working-out are group-centred, and are thus prescriptions for individuals in specific health and fitness settings. Moral law type rules on the other hand are individually centred and do not explicitly refer to particular groups (Elias & Dunning 1986, p. 102). As a consequence of the interweaving of individual exercise behaviours, a set of corporeal norms have developed at the fitness gym that reflect unequal balances of gender-power. The production and reproduction of preferred images of femininity are contingent on the power ratios identified in this chapter so far. I have illustrated this point specifically in terms of instructor / client relationships, and with reference to sculpting sexually attractive bodies.

The corporeal rules of the gym are elastic. So, as I hope my examples have illustrated, the rules governing what counts as acceptable female bodily appearance and performance have some variation. The complexities of female body image already discussed provide evidence that each person can, to some extent, develop or adapt preferred images of female appearance and exercise behaviour. My previous examples of women who desired strong, powerful muscles, or those who displayed fat bodies support such an idea. It could also be argued that gym users could be part of a process of the construction of new body codes. The health and fitness club environment might have the potential, for example, to serve as a foundation for the acceptance of disabled bodies and obese bodies. Further research into the representation of alternative body images is needed.

On the basis of my findings here, it seems that the lean, tight ideals for female bodies are more or less acceptable in the fitness gym. Corporeal norms develop as a consequence of the power ratios between people and can be thought of as "an elastic framework" for work-out activities (Elias & Dunning, 1986, p. 103). People at the gym develop different techniques for sculpting the body-beautiful.

There are corporeal “norms within norms” (Elias & Dunning, 1986, p. 103). What I mean is that there are widely accepted criteria relating to exercise prescription for the promotion of health and fitness. Yet exercisers develop their own ways of achieving ideals of performance and appearance. The bodily norms I have identified in this study represent norms at one level. But corporeal norms develop on several levels and in relation to the development of societies. I examine this proposal more specifically in Chapter 6 where I seek to make connections between idealised female bodies, the production and reproduction of feminine identities and civilizing processes.

In the next part of this chapter I examine further the effects of interdependence, power and femininity in a discussion of established-outsider relations. Examining the exercise behaviours of women more closely, it is evident that some females hold an inferior status in relation to other women and men in the gym. At the same time, greater power chances are afforded to particular groups of active women and men. This point is illustrated below with reference to established and outsider women.

5.9 Everybody Wants to be Somebody: Insider Women and the Body-Beautiful

As has been shown, the gendered relationships evident in the gym setting are characterised by unequal power relations. A consequence of such interdependent relationships is the construction and reconstruction of established-outsider power relations. Established women are relatively empowered in the gym and dance studio through access to exercise knowledge, increased fitness, and the ‘ownership’ and display of acceptable bodies. Several important processes characterise the distinction between established and outsider women. These include: the monopolization of corporeal power resources, the operation of group charisma and group disgrace, and evidence of blame gossip and praise gossip. Such processes also serve to consolidate a relatively superior ‘We’ image in higher status

women and a relatively inferior 'They' image in lower status women. Let me explore these interconnected social processes further.

During the course of my observations in the gym and dance studio, it became evident that some women were more established than others. The domination of physical space was one way in which established women could be identified. The control of space and the securing of particular places were identifying features of established behaviours as well as power tactics used in the consolidation of established identities. Participant observations of exercise-to-music classes, for example, revealed that an established clique of females dominated the space around the instructor at the front of the class. The core group formed a relatively stable unit showing little diversity in its composition. In the gym setting, too, established women were able to dominate equipment that they identified as fundamental to reducing or 'burning' body fat. Such equipment would include treadmills (joggers), static bicycles and steppers. Insiders also reserved the floor mats in the gym where muscular toning exercises such as sit-ups were performed. By placing a towel or water bottle on particular pieces of equipment and letting other exercisers know that they were waiting to use a particular machine, they marked out their personal work-out space.

Moving in close proximity to each other, established individuals also distanced themselves from outsiders. As noted above in the context of the dance studio, established groups secure the space around the instructor, excluding outsiders from seeing the routines effectively and hindering their mastery of movement patterns. Like established women in the gym, insiders in the exercise class reserved their own work-out space with a bag, step equipment, towel or drinking flask. I listened to a conversation between some high status, insider women who highlighted a particular space / place ritual. Sally remarked that: "Sometimes I get there early ... I do like my space ..." and Sarah agreed saying: "Oh yeahme too ... no one would move for you anyway ...I don't move once I'm in my spot". Sally laughed and exclaimed: "I

noticed I ...sometimes I really do think that's *my place*where I can see me (in the mirrors) and the instructor". This conversation illustrates some of the privileges of established groups in exercise practices such as aerobics.

The dominant groups identified in the gym environment and the exercise classes could be said to represent an elite 'society of individuals' (Elias, 1991a) who sometimes gravitated towards each other, striking up conversations in sub-cliques. Yet these cliques were by no means static or fixed. A fluid set of relations existed within groups of established women and men. In the gym, they mingled with different established people. Insider women and men could be seen talking together and sometimes working-out in pairs. It was evident that established pairs exchanged information about exercise routines and techniques. In addition, they could be seen supporting each other during their work-outs with words of encouragement, or by counting the number of repetitions completed, or by direct physical help with equipment. This is not to say that outsiders worked-out alone. On the contrary, they also exercised with others. But it became clear that outsiders tended to group with other outsiders.

My observations illustrate one tactic used by established exercisers to maintain their position of superiority. By working-out with those who had superior exercise knowledge and a superior appearance, established participants could keep their corporeal knowledge to themselves and exchange it only with other insiders. Outsiders were cast in the role of those who 'don't know'. Outsider bodies were more likely to be out of shape and relatively unfit. They carried the stigma of corporeal inferiority modelled on observations of the worst cases of bodily indiscipline. In particular, established exercisers expressed distaste for fat bodies as I have previously explained in terms of the ideology of thinness. But outsiders themselves accepted such an image founded on the minority of the worst instances of poor bodily appearance (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 88). For example, at one interview, Charlie,

had gained a mere 2 pounds in weight, yet she expressed an “emotional generalization” (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 159) about fat bodies when she said “I agree now my bum is big ... fat ... I have to lose it .. it's gross”. Prejudicial attitudes towards fat and unfit physiques are reflected in images of outsider bodies. At the same time, outsider and established participants advocated the superior body image of insiders that is based on the “minority of the best” (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 159). This idea was illustrated during one of my observations when I spoke with Wendy who explained that: “Not many [women] have got the look ...one or two [women] here ...but I love itreally slim ... and toned ... it's what we [women] all want”.

Further observations revealed that, in the fitness classes, established women orientated themselves towards other superior females and the instructor. In both the dance studio and the gym, one could see people forming a dynamic figuration of bodies (Elias & Dunning, 1986). Established women communicated verbally and acknowledged each other with smiles, nods and waves in a “reciprocal exchange” of signs and symbols (Maguire, 1995a). In dance-type classes, established women also used and understood the language of exercise. Some aspects of this exercise lexicon involved verbal labels for specific movements. For example, becoming and being established necessitated learning to perform a repertoire of exercises such as ‘jumping jacks’ (jumping alternately with feet together and then apart while lifting both arms above the head and back to the sides simultaneously), ‘lunges’ (alternate steps to the side or backwards) and ‘the grapevine’ (a step to the side with one leg followed by a step behind and to the same side with the other leg followed with a step to the same side with the first leg again).

Not only do successful participants need to know the names of the exercises, they must also learn a system of non-verbal cues for performing the routines. For example, in the choreographed fitness classes, individual exercises such as ‘jumping jacks’ and ‘grapevines’ are linked together to build complex routines. Sometimes,

instructors use hand signals to guide the class in certain directions or to indicate which movements should be performed next. At first sight, such signs seemed relatively simple. For example, a hand held to the right meant move to the right, whereas one held to the left meant move to the left. Similarly a finger pointing forward indicated that the class should execute a movement going forward and a thumb pointing to the back of the room signalled a move to the back. When the instructor tapped her head, established participants knew that they were to perform the whole routine from 'the top' (the beginning). However, new members, intent on learning to perform the individual exercises correctly were not yet able to look at the instructor, observe the directional signals, and perform the specific movement patterns at the same time. Indeed, being positioned towards the rear of the room, furthest from the instructor, also inhibited their view of directional signals. At the back of the class, collisions were commonplace amongst outsider women as they struggled to coordinate their movements. Clearly, the movements involved in exercise classes take some practice before their execution can be regarded as in any way acceptable. New participants must observe and repeatedly perform the movements in order to master the exercise regime. Without the ability to perform correctly, or to communicate and understand the routines, outsiders remain at the margins of the exercise class.

In the gym area, established women monopolize time on the treadmills and the floor space where they exercise to sculpt the ideal body. Running seemed to be an activity considered extremely important for 'fat burning' and improving fitness. Being able to run was revered by established and outsiders and was associated with achieving an acceptable body shape and size. In an informal conversation with Anna, for example, she exclaimed "I've started running on holiday, with Charlie, and it's brilliant .. my thighs and hips have slimmed down. I'm going to keep it up in the gym. You know? ... do more than walking and hopefully jogging". Her comments help to

explain why the treadmills were a commonly used piece of equipment that people often had to queue to use. Signs around the gym noted that the use of treadmill equipment was limited to 20 minutes at peak (most popular) times. Nevertheless, established women in particular extended their treadmill times even when others were waiting. Sighs, raised eyebrows and shakes of the head, indicated these women's frustrations when a treadmill was not free for their use. I observed and experienced such annoyance and the intimidation of being asked "when do you plan to finish?" or "how much more are you doing?". They made it known that they were waiting to be the next to run. Identifying 'ownership' of their body-work space reflected their dominance in the exercise figuration. Drawing on Massey's (1994) observations about space, place and gender, these illustrations demonstrate that, in the space-time arrangement of the health and fitness gym, established women are relatively dominant.

Displaying desirable standards of bodily appearance, established participants who 'worked out' in the gym were knowledgeable about using the weight training equipment and machines such as the treadmill, stepper, cycles and rowers. These participants knew how to alter the level of difficulty and amount of weight according to their work-out schedules. Outsider women seemed uncertain about how to use the equipment. Marginal participants, who had not achieved a body appropriate for display, demonstrated signs of discomfort in being physically active. They wore clothing that covered their bodies such as long t-shirts and baggy tracksuit bottoms. This observation was confirmed through an informal conversation with Wendy who noted that she wore: "Just a t-shirt and tracksuit bottoms," and then continued "...not the cropped tops or tight shorts. Not with my body". Established bodies signal the possession of an extensive knowledge of body management helping to maintain their ascendancy over outsiders. Another exerciser, Jane, who was someone I interviewed in more depth told me that: "They [weights] are associated with getting muscled but I

know that women don't 'bulk up' like men do. I got educated through talking to people and asking advice and reading [health and fitness books and magazines]." Ingrid also explained how she had gained insightful body knowledge from her undergraduate degree course when she explained, "I learned about nutrition and other bits of knowledge that help [to lose weight]." Tacit knowledge concerning the body, weight (fat) loss, and exercise is exchanged between established exercise participants. It is one power tactic that serves to ensure the reproduction of preferred female body ideals. The corporeal expertise of established participants reflects a greater cultural exercise capital (Bourdieu, 1978).

Some women could be seen keeping 'Progress Records Cards' on which they noted specific exercise regimes, recorded their weight and checked that their heart rate reached specific targets for their fitness and / or 'fat burning' requirements. Exercising regularly, their routines enabled them to learn and remember the exercise practices and regimes most effective in sculpting the body-beautiful. Such learning processes enable specific body shaping exercises and practices to become mastered, and are part of the network of processes in the development of established female bodies. Knowledge is keenly exchanged between insider women in order to expand their repertoire of body improvement strategies. Listening to a conversation during one observation, a group of women discussed exercise and body sculpting in the following way:

(Lesley) I've started a new programme for my legs. Charlie and Vicky suggested it. I'm not sure though ... [I] think I might get too bulky.

(Amy) Yeah but do it properly and diet as well ... restrict the food and lose the fat.

(Megan) Diet is the key ... have you seen that Celebrity Bodies magazine ... it's got all the diets in there ... Jennifer Anniston does that protein thing ... She's so lean.

(Lisa) I think that works ... too much bread and stuff and you store it.

(Megan) Yeah I agree ... they say carbs. (carbohydrates) are good for energy but you've got to be careful.

(Lesley) Maybe I'll go back to doing loads of fat burning CV [cardiovascular] stuff. I know that works. I like to burn for an hour.

These comments highlight that work-out regimes become so deeply ingrained in insider women that eventually they do not always need to keep a written record of them. Gradually they commit their routines to memory. Specific body sculpting exercises and practices become 'second nature' in the development of insider knowledge and established female body ideals. Having illustrated that some women are able to monopolize body-work space and knowledge about bodies in becoming established, the next sections explore the operation of group charisma and group disgrace, and evidence of blame gossip and praise gossip, in the production and reproduction of established and outsider bodies.

5.10 Established-Outsider Bodies and Group Charisma and Group Disgrace

In the fitness gym insider women were knowledgeable about corporeal matters associated with shaping the body as illustrated in the previous section. In the exercise classes, they were also experts in the routines, exercise techniques and the music of the class. At every session, the established group sang the words to the music, and shouted, cheered and clapped enthusiastically as they performed. Established women were active in such exercise figurations in creating a type of group charisma that is part and parcel of their 'We' image (Elias & Scotson, 1994; Mennell, 1992). Insider women experience a sense of gratification and pride in sharing an appropriate mastery of fitness regimes and a slender and muscularly toned appearance symbolic of feminine body ideals. Several examples from my observations and interviews illustrate this point.

Charlie explained "I am good at it (working-out) and I can do it and I feel really good about that ...and obviously I do it for the body thing ...so sometimes it [exercise] doesn't feel enjoyable...but I do it because I am more confident if I am smaller or thinner". It seemed that antagonistic feelings of pleasure and distress are experienced as part of working-out. As Elias and Dunning (1986, p. 106) explain, such apparently opposing feelings are inseparable components of leisure activities. On this basis working-out is best thought of as a process that alternates between feelings of anxiety and fear and pleasurable excitement. The positive feelings evidenced in Charlie's comments above are associated with the social value associated with the body-beautiful. Improved self-esteem comes with the achievement of a slim, tight physique. Such gains reflect the emotional compensation that some women experience for their efforts in bodily self-restraint and discipline. Feeling good about exercise, as well as looking good when exercising, reflects the group charisma that is generated by insider exercisers.

I argue here that mastery of exercise technique and the achievement of the ideal body maintains the dominance of particular women both in the dance studio and in the gym. Performing high intensity movements, or lifting heavier weights or working-out for extended periods of time is revered. Public praise is often heaped upon those who look good and can perform well. Instructors draw attention to their own performance with phrases such as "look at me", "watch my arms", "eyes forward", and "looking front", as well as exaggerated movement patterns. Instructors also encourage participants to look at particular aspects of their own technique in the mirrors by repeating a description of the appropriate posture such as "stomachs in, straight back, squeeze the butt, knees slightly bent, shoulders down". Furthermore, instructors single out particular people who look good or who have mastered a particular technique. Sometimes, I have observed instructors using a participant to

demonstrate good technique. Such practices contribute to the development of the group charisma that serves to maintain the dominance of established women.

Also significant in the development of group charisma is a distinct type of status rivalry that existed between people in their quest for the ideal body. Some women compete against their 'opponents' without using force but clearly gauge their levels of fitness, expertise and appearance in relation to other performers. Fiona, for example, supported the idea of status rivalry when she said: "We (women) compare ourselves to other women looks-wise and fitness-wiseto see who is better". Helen also highlighted how she measured her fitness and bodily appearance against other female exercisers when she said: "I'm not as slim as I can be ...or want to beI look at some womenwho look greatI really try to look like them and keep up with them ...and do what they do". Furthermore, Beth illustrated such status competition when she spoke about a work-out she had conducted with another established female. Beth said: "That work-out I did with Lisa was really good ... I felt proud ... I am fitter than most but I needed that one ... to do a bit more training. It's good to be fitter and look better".

An established corporeal charisma is founded on looking slim and toned and being fit. Setting the standards of appearance, established women wore clothing that revealed particular body parts that they and others thought were the 'right' shape and size and displayed a smooth, tanned skin surface. For some, a cropped top exposed the leanness of the stomach. Others wore tight Lycra shorts to show the muscular tone of the legs and buttocks, and others wore figure hugging sports bras that enhanced the firm curve of the breasts and accentuated the cleavage. Tanned, lean and fit bodies represent the ideal appearance; one that was revered and desired by women I interviewed with and the male and female exercisers I observed both in the context of health and fitness activities.

Concomitant with the development of group charisma is the construction and internalisation of group disgrace by outsider women. The following example attempts to illustrate this idea. During a lively conversation in the fitness gym, a group of women and men discussed the FHM magazine's (a 'lads' magazine) Christmas calendar of beautiful women:

(John) Now that's attractive (pointing to one of the FHM Calendar girls)

(Simon) What, which one?

(Paula) Yeah, which one's are nice then? I bet I don't look like any of them...

.....yet!

(John) All of them actually, well they do all have ... well you know (he points to his chest to indicate the breasts) ... and curvy bottoms and flat stomachs ...they look 'fit'.

(Corrine) Yeah they do all look fantastic. I wish.

In this example, Paula laments the imperfections of her own body, and Corrine claims that she wished to look like the images she was seeing in a calendar. Both these women's comments begin to illustrate the type of disgrace felt by those who did not achieve ideals of appearance. People who work-out in the fitness gym look at themselves, and others, as they reflect upon the bodily shape and size they want to achieve. Commenting on processes of self and other surveillance and explicitly expressing feelings of disgrace about her 'outsider' body, Helen also noted that "I always notice what other people look like. They look better than me...". During my observations I overheard one woman, Sarah, echo this sentiment and illustrate the internalisation of a type of group disgrace when she exclaimed to a friend: "There are one or two women who come down here who look absolutely fabulous. They can make you feel bad ...I don't know how they do it!" What seems to be evident is that at the same time as a 'We' image and group charisma is developed and internalised in relation to established ideals of feminine appearance, a 'They' image and sense of

group disgrace is constructed and embodied in relation to outsider bodies. Some women who performed in the outsider group, in the exercise to music class context, for example, expressed internalised feelings of inferiority and group disgrace as they realised the gap between their existing appearance and performance levels and the ideals they faced within the exercise context. One participant in my exercise class said: "I can't see myself in any of those leotards, I haven't got the body for it". She was expressing the sense of discomfort felt by non-dominant participants. Not having acquired competency in the movement patterns of the exercise class, or the acceptable 'look', Wendy, like others, was too timid to move to the front and remained, perhaps temporarily so, part of the outsider group. In the gym area, outsiders looked unsure about using the equipment. Some tentatively approached instructors to ask for help. Some looked quizzically at equipment, and some asked other gym users for help in apologetic tones. Important in the construction of such We/They ideals, as Elias and Scotson (1994) have found, is the nature and function of gossip. The gossip networks that characterised the exercise experiences of the women in this study are examined in the next section.

5.11 The Nature and Function of Gossip in the 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex'

In their observations about gossip, Elias and Scotson (1994, p. 89) note that "What is gossip-worthy depends on communal norms and beliefs and communal relationships". In the fitness gym, the community of exercisers gossip about bodies. The gym is a place where bodies are worked on, looked at and talked about. Through participant observation, it was possible to hear gossip flowing at the gym. The women I interviewed gossiped about their own and others' bodies. They discussed their appearance. They talked about how they felt and exchanged information on exercise techniques, training regimes and diet. Issues of the body dominated these women's conversations. Reflecting on the importance of body issues, Dina explained that: "these (body) issues are important. They influence how women in sport are perceived

and that's important to me". Anna noted that: "It's (the body) what women think about" and Fiona explained that: "body image is an increasingly important part of my life ... I think it is for all women". These comments serve to highlight that, in the context of the gym and their wider lives, some women's relationships, norms and beliefs about being feminine focus on the body.

Gossip about female bodies was not simply focused on 'bad', 'ugly' or 'fat' bodies. In this regard Elias and Scotson's (1994) emphasis that blame gossip and praise gossip are equally important in the construction of We/They images is insightful. Derogatory comments about bodies that did not match up to established I/We ideals of (heterosexual) femininity served to consolidate and strengthen both superior images of the body-beautiful and inferior images of outsider bodies. Referring to the bodies of celebrity women in this regard, Fiona commented on a newspaper story about a former member of the popular singing group 'The Spice Girls'. She said: "Look at Mel C (Sporty Spice), I don't think she is happy putting on weight. In fact, she has lost some weight. And Madonna looks so fit and healthy and so she is respected for that". Fiona's statement also alludes to the superior status afforded to those who have achieved the ideals of female beauty, just as the following comment by Beth reinforced the inferiority of 'overweight' and 'out-of-shape' bodies. She made the following exasperated comment about her sister:

I couldn't get like that. OK, she has just been pregnant but she is still about 14 stone and it's awful. She's awfully fat ... it cannot be good for her [health]. She says she can't do exercise but I think it's a bit of an excuse and she's just going to eat more and get bigger. I actually spoke to her husband about it and he did say she couldn't exercise yet. But it will be good when she can.

This comment demonstrates that blame gossip is focused on negative feelings and perceptions about bodies that are not acceptably slender, petite and muscularly toned. It also reflects the distaste for fat that I have previously alluded to. Beth also

illustrates the common-sense belief that physical activity is good for one's health, and the assumption that fat is unhealthy. Such gossip was not exclusively made about 'other' women. Women are at the same time the subject and object of their own gossip. Self-defamatory comments were a key feature in the flow of blame gossip and were linked to internalised, seemingly automatic expressions of anxiety surrounding the body. Grace noted that "If I relapse, if I don't look good, I just panic .. and I saw this girl in a magazine with the most perfect bum and legs and I was like, if I do this (exercise and diet) I can look like that". Eva and Anna also alluded to feelings of self-repulsion and self-blame at putting on weight. Eva said "I'm certainly not relaxed at going over 8 and a half stone. I went over to 8 stone 7 pounds and couldn't shift it. It's awful" and Anna noted: "I get really pissed off with myself sometimes. At my fat arse and thighs. Horrible". These comments also indicate that such unfavorable 'They' images of the female body, evident in the flow of gossip at the gym, become incorporated into the self-image of women who feel that their bodies are outside preferable ideals.

All gossip reflects a shared interest in ideal images of the female body. Blame gossip was characterised by negative comments and emotions about bodies that did not reflect established bodily ideals. Praise gossip, on the other hand, was reflected in conversations that supported and upheld established 'We' images. The mutual reinforcement of such images was reflected in gossip networks in the gym environment, and at social occasions outside of the gym. It was the slender, muscularly toned and petite body image that was praised, whereas the unshapely, fat or large body was the source of ridicule and critique. Eva revealed such praise and blame gossip when she said: "Oh I like to look ...fit and healthy and toned and petite ... really fit and skinnyI wouldn't want to be large or fat ... I've been large, I hate it ... no one likes fat".

Networks of gossip about female bodies extended beyond the immediate environment of the gym. These women are interwoven with the longer gossip chains of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. The media, for example, are a source of stories and pictures about the exercise and dietary habits of rich, famous, more usually white, western women (Carlisle-Duncan, 1994). For the women in this study, stories about female models, singers, and actresses provide a source of shared interest in the body. Such personal interest stories are a feature of fitness industry magazines and serve as a means of maintaining dominant ideals of (heterosexual) female beauty as well as integrating established women. Eva confirmed the influence of the media as a source of gossip and a provider of knowledge about achieving an acceptable 'look' and its effectiveness in reinforcing existing female body ideals when she said:

I started buying those slimming magazines. One every month. And I really liked reading those success stories, looking at these pictures of these women who were really fat and had lost 4 stone or something and I loved that and that inspired me and taught me about food values and diets and aerobic exercise and so I got into the body image thing.

Mennell (1992, p. 119) indicates that gossip is "selective" and "distorting". The gossip at the gym reflected such observations. These women selected the least flattering aspects of their own and others' bodies in processes of rejection of outsider bodies. Dina highlighted this point when she explained that she 'worked out' to improve her fitness and her body shape. She said:

If you give up (working-out) you will put on weight which obviously I don't want to do. My mum is quite big and I was always determined I was not going to end up like her. I'd ideally like to lose a tiny bit of weight and be a bit more toned. I can tone my upper body quite easily. But my legs have always been a bit of a problem.

These women also selected the most flattering self and other bodily aspects in adherence to established ideals of the female body. This point was illustrated by Anna who noted “well, look at Dina, she’s kind of got to me even though it’s not totally the body I want. She is slim and firm and no body fat and her skin is lovely. Although her legs are a bit big”

There is evidence that the selective gossip of the gym culture contributes to a somewhat distorted self-image in the women participants. Many of the criticisms they make of their own, and others’, bodies grossly exaggerate their bodily deficiencies. Blame and praise gossip is characterised by emotional modes of thinking. These women are shamed by their own exercise behaviour when it does not meet acceptable levels of work-out frequency, intensity or mastery of technique and when their appearance is not within acceptable limits of attractiveness. Charlie illustrated this point when she talked about her feelings on days when she did not work-out. She noted that: “I feel awful on days I don’t do it (work-out). I run so I won’t get fat and so I can eat I suppose. I have to do it or I feel guilty”. Anna supported this view. Her response to a question regarding the importance of exercise was: “Absolutely very, very, very [important]. I have to go [to the gym] everyday. I feel crap when I am undisciplined and put on weight. Absolutely gutted, disgusting”.

There is a link between high levels of insecurity about the body and the internalisation of gendered self-regulatory mechanisms that will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6. The balance of I/We images of femininity are gradually, in the long term, internalised within the personality structure of the women in this study. For some women, such images seem to be impenetrable even to factual knowledge about what their bodies can and cannot do. While the agents that contribute to the ‘exercise body-beautiful complex’ represent a source of abundant funds of knowledge about the body, bodies still remain uncertain phenomenon and, as noted previously,

some women's relationships with their bodies are marked by insecurity and vulnerability.

Fiona's comments serve to illustrate the sense of vulnerability that women can feel about their bodies. She explained that: "Most women are really body conscious. They think they're not the right shape. Some don't feel confident or relaxed at all". Anna also expressed the sense of vulnerability surrounding the use and display of female bodies in the gym when she noted: "Women do feel threatened in gyms. They are worried they won't fit in and others will look great". Highlighting that outsider women are active in reinforcing their own 'They' image, she added: "This place isn't that bad and commercial like David Lloyd but still one girl told me that if she went in and there was only men in then she would go back out. And I'm more embarrassed when fit and toned women are in there".

Heightened degrees of insecurity about the body serve to consolidate the internal pressure that steers some women towards exercise and dietary regimes aimed at sculpting the body-beautiful. In terms of the women interviewed in this study, it appears that habitual beliefs, values and behaviours are strengthened in the direction of already established ideals of female beauty and femininity. Elias and Scotson's (1994) observations about established-outsider relations and the internalisation of I/We images are fruitful in understanding the deepening and consolidation of feminine habitus in this regard. Strong feelings of superiority and pride about group images can serve to reduce the distortion between fantasy and reality oriented ideals. Nevertheless, with increasing insecurity about a group image, it is more likely "internal pressure, and as part of it internal competition, will drive common beliefs towards extremes of illusion and doctrinaire rigidity." (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 95). Both insider and outsider women expressed heightened insecurity about achieving and maintaining the bodily ideals associated with feminine attractiveness. Established ideals of female beauty have become somewhat narrowly

defined, even though there is evidence in this research of broadening definitions of the female body-beautiful. Preferred images of slimness, tone and fitness are difficult to achieve for many women. At the very least, the development and maintenance of the body-beautiful requires constant bodywork. Given this, it is argued here that 'fantasy' images of female beauty are reinforced: (1) by the insecurity that surrounds the achievement and maintenance of such body ideals; (2) by the gossip networks of the fitness gym; and (3) by the corporeal logic of the wider 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. Slim, muscularly toned and petite bodies represent the narrowly defined images of idealised femininity that are cemented within the social habitus of the women in question. Established images of female beauty have become part of some women's social reality at the gym and in the wider culture. For some women, adherence to collective ideals of the female body-beautiful helps to mutually reinforce the rationality and existence of exercise regimes.

5.12 Becoming and Being an Insider: Exercise Knowledge and the Body-Beautiful

Having examined the ways in which dominant group members embody relatively greater power opportunities in exercise figurations, this section emphasises that established women are not in a position to eradicate the power chances of outsider women. While some women are relatively empowered by having achieved the body-beautiful, such insider women in no way considered their bodies to be complete. They are engaged in continual body work in order to maintain their appearance. Explaining her intention to remain slim, Beth, who participated in aerobics, circuit training and running at least five times per week, echoed the sentiments of all of the women in this study by saying: "I see exercise as making me look good ... I am nine stone now ... my goal is eight and a half stone ... then I won't have any flesh / fat on me ... I just want to be lean". Charlie's comments also illustrate the perpetual body work that insider women habitually engage in. She said: "even when the thought of it [exercise] is awful, I push myself to do it".

The ability of insider women to reduce the power chances of the outsider group is not absolute or static but subject to change. Those aspiring to attain established bodily standards of feminine beauty are active in empowering themselves through the acquisition of what might be called cultural exercise capital. In other words, the acquisition of knowledge about the body and exercise can contribute to the development of improved levels of fitness and an appropriately attractive appearance. More astute outsiders can, over time, sculpt higher status bodies by watching, listening and talking to those 'who know'. Echoing that the 'We' image of established women creates a 'They' image into which outsiders fall, one of the participants in my exercise class explained to me that "It takes time ... to feel a partit looked (like) a nice little clique ... at my first trial in the gymmy first classI was really nervous thinking everyone knew each other. It took about 4 months before I got to know people ... now I see new people who look uncomfortable". This sense of discomfort in outsider participants seemingly becomes part of the embodied self-image of outsider women and was expressed on several occasions by the women who came to the classes I instructed. For example, Wendy expressed such sentiments when she said "It would be nice to look like that ... toned ...and be fit and do the class properly ... I wish I could". And Jo stated that "I look in the mirrors and see slimmer people than meand fitter ones ...and think, God, I wish I could be like that". Wendy and Jo had not yet achieved the body-beautiful, and had not acquired a level of fitness or mastery of exercise technique that characterised the 'We' image of the established women. Such women are 'in limbo' and they become involved in *rites of passage* in an attempt to become part of the established insider group. Such corporeal rituals involve feelings of exclusion and anxiety associated with fat or unfit bodies, muscular aching associated with working-out hard, and hunger pangs from calorie reduction. When Anna asked Maria: "Did you work-out harder like I said?" and Maria: replied "yes, I could really feel it .. I feel sore already ... I suppose

that (and the diet) is going to work better”, the rite of passage associated with working out hard, and dieting to get fit was well illustrated. Beth also shed light on the customary observance of food types and calories involved in the quest for the body-beautiful when she said “you look at the fat content (of food) ... the caloriessometimes you have to go through the dizzy spells ... you know when you haven't eaten enough ... you know you are losing weight then”

Dominant group members expressed an understanding of the feelings of outsiders and showed various degrees of flexibility and tolerance towards the exercise attempts of less powerful participants. Fiona, who was a relatively involved participant alluded to this type of empathy when she talked about the absence of individual shower cubicles in the women's changing area. She said “You can't hide your body at all in here (the changing rooms). If you are not so happy with your body it's a confidence thing and you don't want people to see all your (bodily) flaws. Some people are more self-conscious and I just think that's OK for them to want some privacy. Such expressions of empathy with the feelings of outsider women reflect the dynamic nature of established-outsider relations. These illustrations also highlight a link between the power dynamics of exercise figurations and the internalisation of deeply embedded, feminine identities. In Chapter 6 it is explained that processes of psychologization are important in the construction and reconstruction of gendered identities and habituses. Central in this regard is that the psychological images that the women in this study have of themselves and others are permeated by observation of other women and experiences of being physically active. Established women often expressed their own experiences and observations of the intimidation and discomfort of feeling like an outsider. Beth, herself part of the established group, noted that: “I've put on 5 pounds and that is depressing ... It seems to go on so easily and it's not coming off at the moment ... I don't like it at all and I'm really conscious ... and it's difficult and frustrating”. Apparently, these women are involved in processes of

mutual identification, mutual observation and mutual experience as they mould their exercise behaviour towards acquiring and maintaining status in the group. Such “orientation to experience” (Elias, 2000, p. 400) in the ‘exercise body-beautiful complex’ is central to the construction of We/They images of idealised femininity.

Participation in sport and exercise regimes can turn the bodily aspirations of some women into ‘reality’. It is a well-established physiological idea that physical activity can promote fat loss and improve muscular tone (Bouchard et al., 1990). Such outcomes are fundamental to the meaning that women attach to their workouts. Over time, some women come to perform with greater skill and technique and develop improved levels of fitness. These women have observed and experienced the social benefits associated with achieving the body-beautiful. They are aware of the high esteem that is afforded to women who are slim and muscularly toned both in the gym environment and wider (western) culture. When these women’s exercise endeavours begin to develop a body shape and size that reflects appropriate I/We ideals of feminine beauty they are more likely to uncover their bodies. Engaging in bodily regimes that slim and tone their bodies enables outsider women to move towards more established ideals of female beauty. As the ‘in-house’ exercise regimes begin to develop a more slender physique, these women gradually identify and wear the type of exercise clothing that displays body parts perceived to be appropriate for exposure. As noted previously, established women would most often wear a cropped top to reveal the flatness and tone of their abdomen. They wear tight Lycra shorts highlighting the shape of the buttocks and muscular tone of the legs. Some roll the waistbands of their shorts down to their hips revealing the curve of their waists and the leanness of their hips and stomachs. Some women’s everyday clothing choices were also structured to accentuate the most flattering aspects of their bodies. Charlie, for example described how she would wear clothing to enhance her femininity. She noted: “I don’t necessarily wear clothes that are skin tight ... not tarty ... but the top

would be tighter to show it [the body] off more but still be classy and feminine so that people think I looked nice". Her comments reveal that acquiring and maintaining the body-beautiful constructs a sense of femininity in a wider social sense. Charlie's comments also allude to the wider power of femininity in eliciting praise from others. Similarly, Fiona noted: "you know it's [the body-beautiful] really nice when you want to wear a dress. Women who look feminine have more sex appeal. They give off a message. You look more feminine and you feel more feminine". Fiona's comments further illustrate that those women who have achieved the acceptable 'look' are relatively empowered in the wider western culture, as well as in the gym environment.

In the case of aerobics, achieving insider status is also associated with the body-beautiful and expertise in the movement patterns of the class. Achieving the 'look' and mastery of technique appropriate to the established 'We' image provides a sense of confidence such that these women move towards the front of the aerobics class. Established bodies dominate the insider space at the front of the dance studio. Another exercise to music participant also illustrated how processes of incorporation into the established clique occurred in the fitness gym, saying: "when I was first here I stood at the back so people didn't see me. But now I'm not too worried. I've got used to the class. I look a bit better and I go to the front now..... And I know the machines in the gym tooStill you are always trying to look better....be better" (Maureen). Such a comment also highlights that the improved self-esteem and bodily confidence associated with group charisma is a consequence of gaining insider knowledge of working-out in the gym environment.

In this section some aspects of the gender-power dynamics that characterise the relationships observed at the fitness gym have been illustrated. In the final section some concluding comments are presented.

5.13 Concluding Comments

The main aim of this chapter has been to examine how Elias's ideas about power can further an understanding of femininity, the body and exercise. In the fitness gym, there are various expressions of femininity associated with female bodies that look fit, slim and muscularly tight. Such variations are produced and reproduced as a consequence of unequal power relations between and within groups of women and men in their quest to define the female body-beautiful. In other words, what counts as acceptable in terms of female bodies is founded on the relative capacities of male and female exercisers to control corporeal ideals of femininity.

Some people in the gym environment have more influence over others in terms of defining idealised female bodies. Fitness instructors, for example, have a relatively high degree of control over their clients in this regard. This is because clients tend to be more dependent on instructors for the tacit body / exercise knowledge that clients seek. Such knowledge is central in enabling female clients to achieve the preferred corporeal ideals of slimness and tone. Those instructors who do have a relatively high capacity to compel some female clients to exercise as a means of achieving idealised female physiques, also have a relatively large degree of control over what counts as the female body-beautiful in the fitness gym.

But what Elias's work helps to illuminate is that not *all* clients are equally dependent on *all* instructors in the gym environment. Furthermore, instructors do not have an unlimited capacity to control what counts as feminine. Nor can they compel all women to exercise as a means of acquiring preferred body ideals. There are shifting power balances between instructors and clients. A consequence of such fluctuating power balances is that some women at the fitness gym do not slavishly adhere to the slim, petite, toned ideals of female beauty. Some aspire to develop strong and powerful muscles, and some display fat rather than slim bodies. Weight training women seem to have some potential to expand the limits of the female body-

beautiful. Female muscles are acceptable if they are not too big. However, there is a relatively low potential for fat women to exert their influence over broadening definitions of feminine beauty. This is because there is a considerable degree of anxiety, shame and embarrassment over fat bodies that limits 'fat' as an oppositional image to the preferred female look of slimness, tightness and the appearance of fitness.

The complexities of female body ideals at the fitness gym are also related to the exercise norms that develop there. Reflective of the unequal power balances I have explored in this chapter, there are a set of corporeal rules for working-out that operate as prescriptions for individual exercisers. These rules centre on the use of specific exercise regimes as a means of acquiring idealised bodies. But such rules are elastic. They have some variation. So, whilst preferred images of slimness, muscular tone and fitness dominate the aspirations of female exercisers, some women adapt them. Women who exercise as a way of developing strong, powerful muscles, for example, bend the corporeal rules of the gym.

A consequence of the unequal power relationships that I have explored in this chapter is the production and reproduction of established-outsider relations in the gym. Established women have greater access to exercise knowledge and increased fitness,. They have achieved, and display, bodies that count as acceptable. Established women are relatively empowered in the gym context. Several interrelated processes characterise the distinction between established and outsider women. These include the monopolization of corporeal power resources, the operation of group charisma and group disgrace, and the production of blame gossip and praise gossip. Such processes also serve to consolidate a relatively superior 'We' image in higher status women and a relatively inferior 'They' image in lower status women.

The monopolization of corporeal power by established female exercisers is founded on the control of physical space in the gym environment and the acquisition

of body / exercise knowledge. Established women dominated premium exercise space and equipment. They represented a particular community of exercisers whose exercise knowledge, mastery of technique and 'ownership' of idealised bodies represented a type of social glue that cemented them together. Putting into practice their corporeal knowledge, they tended to display relatively high levels of fitness and idealised female physiques. Such power tactics served to maintain the corporeal superiority of insider groups. At the same time, outsiders were cast in the image of corporeal inferiority, based on people's worst fears for the body. Images of fat, unshapely and unfit female bodies served to consolidate a 'They' image in the outsider group.

The construction and reconstruction of group charisma and group disgrace was also important in the development of insider (we) and outsider (they) images of idealised femininity. Insider exercisers generate group charisma. A sense of satisfaction and pleasure was expressed by some insider women in sharing an appropriate mastery of exercise and a physique symbolic of idealised images of female beauty. Concomitant with group charisma is the production and internalisation of group disgrace by outsider females. Feelings of inferiority about bodily imperfections and a sense of inadequacy about one's exercise performance were felt by some outsider women. Such feelings represent a type of corporeal group disgrace.

One other mechanism serving as a foundation for the construction of We/They images of idealised female bodies is the nature and function of gossip in the fitness gym. In the fitness gym, exercisers gossip about bodies. Gossip surrounds bodily appearance, exercise techniques, training regimes and dietary manipulation. Blame gossip is evident in derogatory comments about fat, unfit and unshapely bodies. Praise gossip is reflected in comments that support established ideals of female beauty. There is a mutual reinforcement of ideal 'We' images of the female

body through the gossip networks of the fitness gym. Gossip is also characterised by emotional modes of thinking. Anxiety, shame and embarrassment surround bodies that do not match ideals.

The dynamics of established-outsider relations that I have explored reveal that some established women have greater corporeal power chances than some outsider women. But established female exercisers are not in a position to completely annihilate the power resources of outsiders. Outsiders are active in obtaining the ideal body and are capable of empowering themselves in, and through, the exercise regime. More astute outsiders can acquire the tacit body / exercise knowledge that will enable them to sculpt the body-beautiful. There is also a degree of flexibility and tolerance exhibited by insiders to the corporeal quest of outsiders. Processes of mutual identification are at work within and between groups of established and outsider women in the fitness gym. In other words, there is a degree of acceptance and understanding of fat and unfit participants, and recognition of their efforts to work-out.

It seems that there are some distinct established-outsider relations in the fitness gym that serve to produce and reproduce corporeal We / They images of femininity. The distinction between higher and lower status women reflects the construction of internal hierarchies of participation, body / exercise knowledge and bodily taste (Bourdieu, 1978, 1984). These differences reflect the pattern of established-outsider relations associated with struggles over the legitimacy of female body ideals in the context of the fitness gym as well as in the wider (western) culture. In the fitness gym, the key characteristics of idealised femininity centre on the development of a body that is lean, muscularly toned and fit. Such preferred images are reflected in the corporeal norms of the fitness gym as well as in the visual and narrative representations of the body by media reporters, sport scientists, fitness experts and medical professionals (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998). Yet, I have observed

that female exercisers negotiate the meaning of body ideals and that different ideas about femininity can be represented in the body.

Female bodies in the fitness gym are contradictory and ambiguous. They represent rather more variation than the public, official image of thinness captures. Some women strive, through exercise, sport, and dietary regimes to achieve the 'look' that is symbolic of female attractiveness and status. Established I/We images of female slimness and tone have become part of some women's social reality at the gym and in the wider culture. But 'fantasy' images of female beauty are reinforced by a series of issues: the insecurity that surrounds the achievement and maintenance of the ideal body; the monopolization of bodily power; the production of group charisma and group disgrace; the gossip networks of the fitness gym; and, by the corporeal logic of the wider 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. For some women, adherence to collective ideals of the female body-beautiful helps to mutually reinforce the rationality and existence of exercise regimes. The extent to which exercise is a pleasurable, liberating and empowering experience depends on the degree to which women are emotionally involved in achieving the I/We ideals of the female body-beautiful.

It seems that some women's exercise experiences are characterised by a "characteristic vicious circle" (Mennell; 1992, p. 167) or what Elias calls a double-bind. At times, high levels of emotionality and insecurity surround some women's perceptions of their bodies. Highly involved with their physically active bodies, some women who work-out seem to have gradually internalised a sense of bodily insecurity that can prevent them from forming a more detached image of their bodies. These women's bodily concerns and desires are based on preferred corporeal images of feminine beauty. The female body-beautiful is founded on a physique that is slender, petite and tight. Some women remain emotionally involved with their preoccupation about achieving such a 'look'. These women use exercise to orientate themselves to female body ideals. It remains difficult for them to realise a

'reality' defined self-image. They struggle to obtain the ideal body. They experience personal distress regarding their bodily imperfections and, some, engage in excessive / obsessive exercise regimes as well as "pathological weight control practices" (Coakley, 2001, p. 208). Yet, other women are able to take a corporeal detour via detachment in understanding that idealised female body images are not necessarily ones that they can achieve. These women do use exercise as a body management strategy, and some of them do struggle to obtain the ideal body. Yet, at the same time, they are aware of the futility in slavishly striving to achieve a look that is beyond the limits of their biological capacity. Markula (1995) has observed, in the context of aerobics, that different exercisers give different meanings to ideal bodies. Indeed, several of my interviewees questioned the dominant ideals of female beauty. For some women, exercise is a pleasurable means of constructing a more self-defined body image. The next chapter aims to explore the relationships between body image, working-out, and the production of feminine identities.

CHAPTER 6

The 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex':

The Production and Re-production of Feminine Identities

6.0 Introduction

A review of some previous studies on gender, sport and identity was presented in Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, I introduced some of the links between established-outsider theory and civilizing processes that might illuminate the problem of gender in sport and exercise (see sections 3.8 and 3.9). The principal aim of this chapter is to examine the fitness gym as a site for the production and reproduction of feminine identities and habitus. I argue that Elias's conceptualisation of identities and identification can shed light on the formation of I/We images of femininity in the fitness gym. I also explore the ideas of a selection of feminist scholars as I discuss the relationships between working-out, the body, and the production, reproduction and inculcation of femininities.

The chapter begins by conceptualising identity. Some of the different ways that social theorists think about identity are examined. The chapter examines Elias's ideas about identity and identification, and his notion of social habitus as a means of shedding light on the embodiment of feminine identities in the fitness gym. The personal pronoun model is advocated as useful in understanding the formation of gender identifications in this study. I draw on figurational and feminist theorising in an analysis of the centrality of the body to the formation of feminine identities. It is argued that there is a connection between the formation of We images of femininity, and personal self-images of femininity, in the unequal and fluctuating power ratios between and within groups of women and men at the fitness gym.

6.1 Conceptualising Identity

Questions of identity have come to be of central concern in sociology and the sociology of sport. More specifically, feminist research and theories about sport have made a major contribution to our understanding of the production and reproduction of gender identities (Birrell, 1988, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994; 2000 Theberge, 2002). Opinion among sociologists regarding identity is divided, and questions of identity are vigorously debated (Burkitt, 1991, 1999; Hall, 1992, 1996; Roseneil & Seymour, 1998; Woodward, 1997). Indeed, the concept of identity and the debate surrounding its conceptualisation are complex. I endeavour to briefly explore the phenomenon of identity here in order to lay the foundations for a more informed discussion of the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities in the health and fitness context.

Hogg and Abrams (1992, p. 2) define an individuals' identity in terms of "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others". This definition reflects a broader sociological debate about the concepts of the 'individual' and 'society', and serves to introduce some of the different conceptions of identity that prevail in the literature. Following what has been termed the Enlightenment project, there is a set of ideas about self-identity based on the conception of human beings as "essential, unitary, fixed and unchanging" (Roseneil & Seymour, 1998, p. 3). Reflected in the psychoanalytical tradition, the assumption here is that all human persons experience a sequence of processes in the development of their individual identity. In other words, the inner-self emerges when the person is born and unfolds during his or her lifetime while staying essentially the same (Hall, 1992).

In contrast to the conception of the autonomous subject, another strand of work on identity reflects ideas about how groups of people impact on the construction and reconstruction of identity. This symbolic interactionist perspective advocates that the

notion that identity is formed by the *interaction* between the individual self and society. The central idea here is of the “sociological subject”; the person who still has an “inner core” but whose ‘centre’ is continually constructed and reconstructed in terms of the cultural world outside the subject (Hall, 1992, p. 276). This classical sociological conception of identity assumes that people present the inner-self through the cultural identities offered by the outside world, at the same time as internalising the meanings of those cultural identities. Such a view serves to represent both the subject and the cultural world in which they live as unified and predictable. Yet, the conception of identities as unified and stable has been challenged (Elias 1978, 1997; Hall, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Butler, 1990). Indeed, in terms of understanding gendered identities, criticism has been aimed specifically at feminist conceptions of “universalistic, homogenized and ‘white’ assumptions” regarding women (Maynard, 2002, p. 111). Several critics of such homogenous conceptions of female identities have written specifically about sport and exercise (Birrell, 1988; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000). According to Hall (1992, 1996) identities are best thought of as multiple, sometimes contradictory, and sometimes unresolved. Furthermore, processes of identification are variable, problematic and open-ended. Also important in terms of gender identification, is the significance of bodies. What I mean to say is that the formation of feminine and masculine identities is contingent upon the body (Gatens, 1992).

There is another corpus of theories about identity that have been used by feminists seeking to further an understanding of the open-ended process of human identification. Drawing on the work of Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, poststructuralist theories emphasise the fragmented, multiple, fluid and unstable characteristics of identity. Poststructuralist theorists, broadly speaking, reject the idea of any core, essential element of identity. Any notion of a complete and coherent identity is also

countered. Poststructuralist theories are becoming increasingly popular in feminist scholarship in the sociology of sport (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Indeed, such ways of thinking have been harnessed in understanding sport, the body and gendered identities (see for example Bordo, 1993; Caudwell, 1999; Markula, 1995; Obel, 1996; Pronger, 1998). These poststructuralist accounts are characterised by a shift in emphasis from the “structural constraints” on women and men to the potential of sport and exercise to be empowering (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002, p. 41). Arguments are made against a single explanation of gender identity, and the homogenised categories of woman / women and man / men are challenged. The focus of such analyses is on diversity and difference within and between groups of women and men, and the multifaceted nature of femininity and masculinity. However, as explained next, poststructuralist accounts of gendered identities are not without their problems.

For Butler (1990), who offers a poststructuralist examination of gender, identity is constructed through the discursive character of particular ‘discourses’. An overarching theme of poststructuralism generally, and Butler’s ideas about gender more specifically, is the centrality of power in the construction of identity. Identities are viewed as constituted through “discursive exclusion” in relation to binary opposites (Roseneil & Seymour, 1999, p. 4). In terms of gender, sport has been examined as a site for the maintenance of binary opposites such as woman / man and homosexual / heterosexual. There have been attempts to deconstruct these binary concepts (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002; Sykes, 1998). But still, poststructuralist contributions seem to present a somewhat limited analysis of the relationship between power and identity construction. Roseneil and Seymour (1999) contend that poststructuralist theories of identity raise the issue of human agency in terms of the production of identity, but ultimately present a situation in

which the person has little power against the domination of 'discourse' and hence no opportunity to reconstruct, or produce new identities.

While poststructuralist feminists such as Judith Butler have called into question the notion of a fixed and stable concept of femininity, her thesis about 'performativity', gender and identity rejects ideas about choice or deliberate action in processes of identity formation (Butler, 1993). For her, the gendered subject is produced as the reiteration, or performance, of a particular discourse. But such a conception seems too narrow for understanding the formation of femininity in the context of the fitness gym I have investigated. The women I have spoken with and observed seemed to me to make choices about their body image and engage in acts of deliberate and intentional exercise behaviour. Having said that, such decisions were not without their limits or unintended consequences. As I have argued in Chapter 5, the development of feminine identities in the health and fitness gym is contingent upon a complex network of fluctuating power ratios between and within groups of women and men. In addition, while feminine identities are variable and interlaced with a diversity of identity characteristics such as class, race/ethnicity, age and (dis)ability, the evidence in this study suggests that they are not always so fleeting, temporary, bewildering and unstable as some poststructuralist theorists would claim. In this study, aspects of some women's character reflected what seemed to be relatively enduring dispositions of femininity that suffused their exercise behaviour.

Having outlined some of the ways in which identity can be conceptualised, the following sections propose ways that Elias's theories about identity and social habitus can further an understanding of the various femininities developed in the fitness gym. I begin by explaining the usefulness of the personal pronoun model in this regard. Subsequent sections explore, in more detail, the complexities of feminine identities and

inequality observed within the social interdependencies which are the subject of this study.

6.2 The Personal Pronoun Model: Fitness, Femininities and Identification

Fundamental to the personal pronoun model is Elias's (1978) contention that human beings have never been solitary individuals. One of the features of his theories about human identification is his critique of the image of people as "isolated objects in a state of rest" (Elias, 1978, p. 118). Notions about the 'the individual' (a *homo clausus* concept) existing as autonomous, independent and self-reliant prevail in classical sociological theory, philosophy, and, as indicated above, in popular conceptions of the self. Such psychological images of human beings are the basis for the idea of the individual and society somehow operating separately and beyond each other. Elias (1978, p. 119) is quite clear that such a conception of self-identity and image of humans, does not correspond to observable facts. Peoples' images of themselves (I images) and of others (We images and They images) have always been formed over time within groups of interdependent people (Mennell, 1994). For Elias, human persons should not be thought of as simply going *through* a process of identity formation. Rather it is much more helpful to our understanding of identity to think of a person as in constant motion. Following Elias's (1978, p. 118) expression, then, "he[sic] not only goes through a process, he *is* a process". Noting what at first sight, seems to be an uncritical use of the male / masculine pronoun 'he', I reflect upon the gendered nature of personal pronouns further on in this section. First, I wish to clarify further Elias's conceptualisation of *identification*.

As well as his critique of the image of people as isolated and static, Elias's (1978) approach to identification and his personal pronoun model included another fundamental idea; that is the idea that the term 'individual' refers to people in the

singular and 'society' refers to people in the plural. This idea is also reflected in Burkitt's more recent argument that a sense of self is inseparable from bodily practices, and bodily processes occurring within social relations (Burkitt, 1999). In terms of the fitness gym, 'individual' exercisers, then, are simultaneously part of a 'society' of exercisers. Thinking like this, moves beyond the idea of each single person working-out above and beyond every other person, as if people were separate and alone in the fitness gym. Thinking of exercisers at the fitness gym in the plural, as a multitude of interdependent people, is central to the game models that informed my analysis of the gender / power dynamics of the fitness gym in the previous chapter. Throughout the present chapter, the links between the production and reproduction of I, We, and They images of femininity and the unequal and fluctuating balance of gender / power in the fitness gym are re-visited. If this analysis is to offer anything in terms of understanding aspects of sport, gender and identity, then I need to think of myself and the people I have observed as "people among other people, and involved in games with others" (Elias, 1978, p. 121). Having presented two fundamental features of the personal pronoun model, I now emphasise how such a conceptual tool can help to explain the formation of femininities in the fitness gym.

The pronoun 'I' is commonly used to refer to some independent, isolated person. Yet, Elias points out that, on closer inspection, the personal pronoun model of communication illustrates that the individual ('I') is positioned in a set of relationships and cannot be treated separately from *all* other personal pronouns; 'you' (singular), 'he', 'she', 'we', 'you' (plural) and 'they'. When used in communication, the pronoun 'I' can only be understood in terms of *all* the positions to which *all* other pronouns refer. Returning to a point made previously about Elias's seemingly uncritical use of the male / masculine pronoun 'he', it begins to become clear that Elias cannot necessarily be

accused of sexist thinking. While he might have made the gendered point more explicit, gender relations are implicit in Elias's use of personal pronouns. The gendered character of the pronoun 'he' cannot be understood without consideration of all the other personal pronouns, and the gendered positions to which they refer. When the women in this study spoke about femininity, they used personal pronouns in a taken-for-granted way to communicate and map out the interdependent relationships that people have with others in the fitness gym and in the wider cultural sense. As Elias (1978, p. 124) puts it "the pronouns are relational and functional; they express a position relative either to the speaker at the moment or relative to the whole intercommunicating group".

While Elias (1978) does not explore the gendered aspect of personal pronouns, they certainly incorporate a gendered dimension. Personal pronouns reflect that every person is fundamentally related to others in a gendered way. Indeed, the personal pronoun model help us to understand that every human person is fundamentally a gendered social being. In terms of gender, the pronoun 'she' refers to a female person and persons / things personified as feminine. The pronoun 'he' is used to refer to a male person and persons or things personified as masculine. In the fitness context, the use of such gendered pronouns is replete with ideals about acceptable male and female bodies. Anna and Dina articulated this idea during informal conversations about muscular female physiques. Explaining that muscular definition was acceptable for women but muscular size / bulk was not, Anna emphasised that "too big muscles are awful too masculine ...not feminine ...I want to be a *she* not a *he*". Speaking about the same issue, Dina also noted that "I don't want to look like Fatima Whitbread ... she's, or should I say 'he's', too manly".

Beth also illustrated the link between gender, the body and pronoun relationships when she considered what counted as a feminine physique. She said "at the gym ... I

can get the right body ...slim ... lean ... tight ...like a feminine girlr ...when I played hockey ...wella lot of *them* were lesbians and *they* were the butch type ... *me* and another girl, *we* were more girly". In speaking of 'I', 'Me', 'He', 'She' 'They', 'Them' and 'We', these comments illustrate the "relational and functional" character of personal pronouns previously noted (Elias, 1978, p. 124). The personal pronouns these women use express gendered identifications, gendered positions, and sexual orientations relative to themselves, and to the group of exercisers to which they refer. The pronouns express ideas about what counts in terms of acceptable feminine identities.

The model can be examined a little further at this point. The previous comments in this section indicate that the women I have spoken with about femininity used the pronouns 'you' (singular), 'he', 'she', 'we', 'you' (plural) and 'they' to communicate their sense of feminine identity. Such references illustrate that these women's awareness of their own separate sense of femininity is identical with their awareness of other peoples' sense of feminine identity. Understanding the meaning of the feminine 'I' (Me) is linked to understanding the meaning of 'We' (Us) as feminine, as well as having a sense of 'They', in terms of femininity. Some light was shed on this issue during some of the interviews that explored what it meant to be feminine. The following examples illustrate this point.

Beth explained that different ideas about the feminine self (I) were part and parcel of how other men and other women perceived female body images. She did this by describing what it meant to be feminine in the context of identifying other women as feminine, and by her assumptions about what other women and men counted as feminine. She said "there are different types of femininesome men would say ...slender, long blonde hair and very pretty like, Suzy....others the natural look like Amyand maybe the fragile look like Pippa might be feminine to some men". She

discussed her thoughts on her own and others' perceptions about femininity further by saying: "well ... it's not just what men think I guessI mean I think different looks are all feminine ... And the lean, tight look like me and other women who work out ... is feminine". Grace also reinforced the idea that awareness of her own 'I' sense of femininity matched her awareness of other peoples' sense of feminine identity by saying: "I want to be feminine .. I mean to be thought of as feminine ...attractiveby others ...in my experience, it's what men prefer". Grace's final comment about feminine identity was that a sense of feminine self (I) depends on "the person you are, your character, your body and what others think". In other words, for some of the women at the gym, a sense of self (I) is embodied, and produced in relation to how others behave and feel (We). Thus, it can be seen that understanding the intended sense or meaning that some women's exercise behaviours have for themselves is one way of understanding how working-out at the fitness gym has an I / We function in terms of the production and reproduction of feminine identities.

The comments included in this section, then, serve to illustrate the "multi-perspectival character" of gender relationships (Elias, 1978, p. 127). As Elias (1978) emphasises, using the personal pronoun model demonstrates that the people of whom we might speak in the third person speak of themselves in the first person and of us in the third. In terms of perspectives on feminine identities, I have emphasised (in italics) where the following extracts from Beth's interview illustrate my point. In response to my questions about whether her physique was feminine she replied "*I* am feminine ... people say to me *you* look feminine ... I mean *I* think *you* look feminine ... and my friend Suzy, *she* is feminine; girly feminine other women, *they* look feminine; classy feminine". While Beth is only talking about women in this comment, she and other interviewees noted that perceptions of both women and men were significant in the

construction and reconstruction of feminine identities. These women explained that their sense of femininity was founded on “what men ... preferred ... as a feminine look” (Dina), as well as “what women think ...about women’s bodies” (Charlie), and “how other women judge women’s bodies” (Fiona). Emphasised later is the idea that these *perspectives* on femininity are associated with maintaining the established-outsider relations between and within groups of women in the gym as they seek to sculpt preferred images of the female body-beautiful. Next, I wish to illustrate that as well as the personal pronoun model, there is another way that Elias’s conceptualisation of identification can shed light on the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities in the fitness gym. Elias (1978) emphasises the multi-layered nature of identity, and the idea that identities are produced at different levels. A concept of ‘difference’ has been more widely accepted in feminist theorising as the foundation upon which to advance knowledge about gender identities (Maynard, 2002). The following section seeks to examine how thinking about identification at several levels can contribute to an understanding of feminine identities in the fitness gym.

6.3 Feminine Identities, Social Habitus and the Fitness Gym

One of the major themes to emerge from more recent feminist research into sport and the body concerns the multi-faceted ways in which women experience physical activity and the array of different feminine identities that are formed in the context of sport and exercise (Birrell, 2002; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 2000; Maynard, 2002; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Hargreaves (2000, p. 6), for example, argues that, in the context of sport, different gender identities are formed at different levels by explaining that difference is constructed “at the level of the subject and at the level of institutions and politics”. There are parallels between such feminist thinking and a figurational approach to understanding identification because Elias also emphasises that the human

self is formed by multiple identities and argues that identities are constructed at different levels.

Following Elias's ideas about identification, Mennell (1994) explains that there are many characteristics that people share with all others. At one level, then, gender is a characteristic that all people at the fitness gym, indeed all human beings share in common. This is not to say that gender is a universal, homogenous or natural characteristic. Gendered identities are never fixed or biologically determined (Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Gatens, 1992). Rather, all people have *some* conception of being feminine and masculine. It is recognised that, in the context of the gym, as well as the wider culture, it is less likely that people who do not fit the traditional models of femininity and masculinity will subscribe to a shared sense of gender identity. There are fewer images of alternative gendered identities available in (western) cultures (Butler, 1990; Hargreaves, 2000). Still, all people are gendered and interdependent with others in specifically gendered ways. The previous analysis of gender, identification and the personal pronoun model was an attempt to illustrate this point.

At the same time as people share gendered characteristics, every individual human personality is uniquely gendered by virtue of their personal biography, experience and knowledge. Different exercise biographies, bodily experiences and corporeal knowledge are significant in the formation of femininities. As the discussion in Chapter 5 illustrated, images and perspectives of femininity are varied. Beth was explicit about this idea when she said "being feminine is different thingseveryone is different". She explored her own conception of femininity further saying "I supposeit depends on your experiences". When I asked her how "experience" might impact on one's femininity she said "well ... it's like ... being sporty and doing exercisethat's made me thinkI am feminine if my body is leanwith muscular definition...toned

and thin". Fiona adhered to a slightly different version of femininity, developed through her experiences at dance school. She said that a feminine look is "as thin as possiblelike a ballet dancerthat comes from seeing the really thin ones get praised by the ballet teachers". Grace's notion of femininity was associated with a "curvyshapely" look with "a small waistshapely bottom and a bust". When I asked her why she held such views she replied "in my experience ...it's what men preferit's sexy". In addition to the variations in femininity identified by Beth, Fiona and Grace, some women adhere to a broader sense of femininity through the construction of strong, powerful bodies. Dina, for example, said "I've always been sporty right from school.....it's (training / working-out) intense...I feel fit ...strongI want to feel powerfulbe stronger ...it's motivating ...using my body ...doing sport to a high level". At the fitness gym, then, some women are able to move and use their bodies in ways that challenge both a more traditional feminine bodily experience and a narrow sense of feminine identity (McDermott, 2000; Young, 1990).

These brief examples are meant to demonstrate that the formation of feminine identities is characterised, to some extent, by difference. The general findings of this research support the idea that there is no singular image of femininity. An increasing amount of scholarship in the sociology of sport explores the formation of gendered identities in terms of difference and diversity (Caudwell, 1999; Connell, 2000; Carrington, 2002; Scraton, 2001; Wray, 2002). The concept of difference can be conceptualised in a variety of ways (Maynard, 2002). More recent feminist theorising has harnessed the concept in exploring differences *between* women. 'Difference' in this sense suggests diversity in terms of "race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality, age and disability *among women*" (Hall, 1996, p. 40). However, an emphasis on difference may neglect significant aspects of gendered experience and character that might be shared.

The development of feminine identities in the fitness gym, and in the wider social milieu seems to be contingent upon the balance between identity and difference, and individual and social habituses. The proposal here is that thinking about the formation of identity at different *levels* emphasises that “identity embodies sameness *and* difference” (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 7). This point is reinforced when one considers, as Elias (1978, 1997) does, another layer of identification that, if explored, can shed light on the construction of feminine identities in the fitness gym. Let me try to explain.

The formation and reformation of multi-layered identities is not only founded upon both common and unique characteristics. Simultaneously, and at another level, people also share *some* characteristics with *some* other people in the groups to which they belong. It is the term social habitus that Elias (1997) uses in understanding this latter level; that is, the level at which *certain* behaviours and emotions are common to those in particular groups. Recognising that levels of identity construction are interwoven, I am specifically concerned here with examining femininity at the level of social habitus. In other words, the discussion centres on those feminine characteristics that are common to some of the women who work-out.

The concept of habitus seems to be most commonly associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1978, 1984, 2002). Previous to Bourdieu's work, Marcel Mauss (1973, pp. 71-72) alerted readers to the idea that, in terms of techniques of the body “Each society has its own special habits”. Mennell (1992, 1994) also points out that Bourdieu seems to have borrowed the term habitus from Elias's work. Indeed, in the preface to Distinction Bourdieu (2002, p. xi) himself acknowledges that Elias's ideas have contributed to his thesis about the “particularity” of French culture. For Elias then, the concepts of habitus and identity are closely related. Identity can be differentiated from habitus because it represents a more conscious awareness, a degree of reflective

articulation, and some emotional account of the shared characteristics of a group, as well as an understanding of those traits that are perceived as different from other groups (Mennell, 1994, p. 177). Examining issues of sport and national identity, Maguire and Poulton (1999) explain the notion of national habitus codes in terms of 'sleeping memories' which tend to form around common symbols, such as national sports teams, that reinforce I/We images of national identity. According to Mennell (1994, p. 177) the term 'habitus' can be defined as "the modes of conduct, taste, and feeling which predominate among members of particular groups". For Elias (1996, 2000), the term is also represented by the phrase 'second-nature' because habitus refers to the acquired and unconscious nature of shared traits.

An observation of some importance in terms of the production and reproduction of feminine habitus and identities at the fitness gym is that some women shared a preference, and emotional tie towards particular exercise behaviours and female body ideals. Grace, for example, explained that acceptable images of femininity were founded on a shared conception that femininity equated with slender, tight female bodies. She said "We (women) all want to be feminine ... to be attractive (slim and tight)that's why we exercise ...and diet ... it would feel wrong otherwise...like not being a woman if you are not feminine like that". Grace's comment illustrates the idea that working-out is part of a repertoire of body management techniques considered by some women as a normal way to achieve a feminine look.

Specific modes of conduct, taste, and feelings about exercise and female body images can be said to represent a feminine body habitus. In other words, bodies are central in the formation of femininities at different levels of habitus. Several of my interviewees illustrated a connection between a desire to achieve the slender, muscularly toned ideals of female beauty, and preferences for exercise that they

believed would enable them to sculpt approximations to such idealised feminine images. In discussions about her work-out routines, Beth explained her preference for cardiovascular exercise as a means of reducing body fat by saying "I like the aerobic work ...love itto lose the fat ...then the toning will give me the shape". Similarly, Charlie explained that "I like to burn (fat) ... for 45 minutes at least each timeif I don't I am annoyed", and Fiona said "it's all about weight loss ...losing the fat That's why I am drawn to the CV (cardiovascular) machines". These comments show that some women's exercise behaviour is constructed as a means of body management. Exercises that reduce body fat and tone muscles are the activities of choice amongst such women, and represent the reason why Beth, Charlie and Fiona "love" or "like" those types of exercise regime. The previous comments serve to illustrate my observation that some women at the gym share a disposition towards cosmetic fitness activities. For these women, slim and toned female bodies equate with idealised notions of femininity. Such thinking is the foundation for their choice of cosmetic fitness activities and reflects the idea that the fitness gym is a site for the formation of a feminine body habitus.

A feminine body habitus is not simply founded on the objective representation of female body images at the gym (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988). All of these women's dispositions towards the body had a feminine specification. Eva, for example, noted that she used many body management regimes that would enable her to maintain an "attractive, sexy" look. She said "I shave my legs ...otherwise my husband calls me...well you know a German athleteor lesbian...and it's not feminine or attractive". Providing more details about her beauty routines she explained "I like a tan ...even fake ...I always cleanse, tone and moisturisebit of blusher, bit of lipstickmakes you feel nice ...attractive...like a woman". For Eva, being attractive to men, and worthy of corporeal praise from women equated with being feminine. Anna also illustrated this

point when she said "I want to be attractive to men, so it is important that I am feminineattractiveness is the key thingwith the body ...make upclothes ...you want men to look at you....and women ...to compliment". These comments capture the idea that exercise, dieting, cosmetics, and beauty routines represent a repertoire of body management techniques that these women considered to be a "natural" (Eva), "normal" (Charlie) part of being feminine. When Eva spoke about body management she said, "it'sall about being a woman".

Following Burkitt (1999, p. 1) here, it seems impossible for these women to contemplate being feminine without the body. While Elias (1991b, p. 195) notes the particular importance of the face as the "display board" of a person's identity, I argue here that the female body in its entirety, is central in laying claim to a feminine identity. Notwithstanding the variety of theoretical differences, feminisms have alerted us to the centrality of the body in terms of gender identity politics. What was evident in this study was that for some women, laying claim to an appropriate feminine, I / Me / She / We identity, is founded on the acquisition of a slim and toned physique. Anna introduced the significance of the body in terms of her sense of identity when she said: "when I am lighter, and slim, I love it ...it makes me feel better, more sexy, more attractive, more feminine". Eva was even more forthcoming about the relationship between the body and her sense of what counted as feminine when she explained that "keeping fit, looking fit Getting the right shape and looking healthy ...it's a sign of a healthy, fit, attractive, strong woman". Anna and Eva's comments offer some insights into the relationship between female bodies and femininities that Gatens (1996) explores.

For Gatens (1996, p. 13), the relationship between the female body and femininity, and the male body and masculinity can be described as "contingent, though not arbitrary". In other words, female and male bodies produce and reproduce the

cultural signs and experience of femininity and masculinity but those signs and experience are not static, fixed or simply determined by biology (Burkitt, 1999). Several feminist scholars in the sociology of sport have discussed the relationship between the body and feminine, and masculine character (Cole, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994; Hall, 1996; Sassatelli, 2000; Markula, 1995; Tate, 1999). Such work illustrates the complex relationship between female bodies and the formation of feminine identities. Explaining that sports are sites for the reproduction of traditional images of femininity, these writers also emphasise the potential of sport in the construction of alternative and new feminine identities. This point was illustrated by some of my interviewees. For example, Fiona supported the idea that the fitness gym was a site for the production and reproduction of popular images of slender, thin female bodies when she said "here (at the gym) it is all about those societal images ... in the magazines ...it's blatant, obvious, gorgeous women ...no one wants to be fat It's the slimness that women want to identify with". Yet, at the same time, Dina illustrated the potential of working out in terms of challenging established and preferred images of the female body. She said, "Working-outI can get more power, more muscles I can be strongI don't have to be totally what society says about women". Such comments are also supported by previous discussions in Chapter 5 about some of the corporeal paradoxes related to what counts as a feminine body ideal in the fitness gym. More recent feminist theorising in the sociology of sport illustrates that there is no universal female sporting body and no universal female sporting identity (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 173). Such a claim can also be made in connection with male sporting bodies and identities (see for example Maguire, 1986; Messner & Sabo, 1990).

In terms of working-out, then, my interview material points to the development of a feminine body habitus founded on what McDermott (2000, p. 342) refers to as

“appearance related concerns”. Beth supported this idea by saying: “femininity is different things ...but mostly what you look like”. But a feminine body habitus is not simply formed through one’s involvement at a fitness gym. There is a temporal character to the formation of habitus. A dominant theme to emerge from my findings was that adolescent memories of the body, and experiences in physical activity had an effect on the formation of a feminine body habitus. The next section examines the connection between adolescence, the inculcation of feminine dispositions, and claims to a feminine identity.

6.4 Adolescence, Feminine Habitus and Exercise Identities

The inculcation of particular modes of feminine conduct and corporeal tastes and preferences happens over time. Furthermore, the development of a feminine identity is founded on the relationships that women have with other people in a variety of social settings. Sport and exercise is one context for the internalisation of likes and dislikes about female bodies and body management routines. To some extent the women in this study had shared exercise histories. In other words, they had common memories of physical activity that served as the foundation for shared perceptions of femininity. Such shared aspects of femininity were centred upon specific references to the weight, shape and size of female bodies. At the same time, a shared sense of femininity seemed to be founded upon specific rules governing acceptable uses of the female body in physical activity. Let me try to illustrate these points.

My interviews and observations revealed that present concerns about the weight, shape and size of the body had come to the fore through earlier bodily experiences. Anna, for example noted that “When I got hips...at about 13 years old ... I really slowed down. I couldn’t hurdle in athletics ...I was uncomfortable”. Beth explained that “I was conscious in my early teensthat I was developing and getting bigger. I couldn’t do

the gymnastics and my running was slowerI felt bigheavy". Somewhat negative feelings about the body were also articulated by Eva who said "my peak fatness was nine and a half stone and I was miserable ...I was 16 ...it might have been puppy fat but that doesn't help ...I felt gross". These women were unhappy with their 'overweight' bodies during adolescence. McDermott (2000) has also found that some women feel equally unhappy at being tall or skinny. It is also the case that boys may feel awkward about their bodies during adolescence. The point here is that, at an age where female bodies are changing from 'girls' into 'women', there seems to be a gendered emphasis on appearance related concerns (Scruton, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; McDermott, 2000). Such concerns impact on women's attitudes towards, and involvement in physical activity.

Being overweight during adolescence inhibited some women's abilities in physical activity. Beth captured this issue when she revealed that a previous enthusiasm for sport was curtailed during her teenage years because "I was getting big ...with a little bustand heavier ...so running and gymnastics was difficult". Such comment also introduces one way of understanding the decreasing importance of competitive, organised sport in the lives of some adolescent girls (Scruton, 1992). Some of the women I spoke with had enjoyed competitive games as children. Yet, during adolescence, traditional sports become relatively unimportant. An informal conversation with Helen, for example, revealed that during her 'teens', sports like netball and hockey were "sometimes a chore". When I asked her to explain such negative feelings she spoke of an increasing "self-consciousness" about the body during adolescence. She explained that it wasn't necessarily that she didn't like games but that having to change her clothing for Physical Education (PE) classes, in front of other girls, and wear short skirts and "games knickers" (Helen) was not conducive to positive feelings about the

physically activity body. As Helen noted "it always seemed that you had to run around with hardly any clothes onand you knew everyone watched andit was a self-conscious thingembarrassment ...about your body".

Furthermore, Eva illustrates the way in which adolescent females seek activities linked to their preferred ideals of femininity (Hargreaves, 1994). She said "I got all those girls magazinesand got into the dancing ...aerobics ...I knew it would burn the fat, you see". Eva's comments lend weight to the idea that from an early age, it is not uncommon for girls to learn to construct physical activity as a means of managing the appearance of the body (Hargreaves, 1994; McDermott, 2000). The women in this study were not deterred from physical activity when they felt unhappy with their bodies. Rather, corporeal experiences of being "fat", "chunky" or "bulky" served to develop their taste for types of exercise that might contribute to the construction of an appropriately feminine appearance.

Elias's work on identification has something to add here in terms of understanding sport, exercise and the construction of feminine identities. Explaining processes of human identification, Elias (1991a, p. 184) highlights that "continuity of development is the condition of identity". In other words, the later personality of a person is interdependent with the "development flow" (Elias, 1991a, p. 186) of previous characteristics, inscribed through experience and within a person's unconscious. Put simply, these women's present concerns about their appearance, current preferences for particular exercise regimes, and enduring taste for cosmetic fitness activities, are rooted in earlier bodily experiences. The dominance of appearance-based experiences of physical activity may also be explained by the role of physical education during adolescence. As has been discussed at length by several feminist scholars, Physical

Education (PE) is significant in shaping attitudes to the body (Scraton, 1992; Sharpe, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Hall, 1996).

These women's memories of PE in secondary school revealed the tendency for girls to be encouraged into female-appropriate sports such as gymnastics, dance, netball and hockey. Grace, for example, captured this when she said "Girls weren't allowed to play footballI suppose it was a bit rough and aggressive for girls and we might get hurt ...so we played the ladies games ...netball ...rounders". Explaining her involvement in predominantly female-appropriate sports, Beth said, "I suppose Mum and Dad wanted me to do netball and hockey because they were considered to be more female sports. I think everyone thinks of girl's sport as netball." When Beth was asked to explain what she meant by a "girl's sport" she replied:

I mean I didn't play football or Rugby. We [the girls] couldn't play. I suppose with both of them they are a little bit rougher. I watch people play football and the way they go down in the tackles, well you wouldn't get that in a netball or hockey game. They [rugby and football] are more falling on the floor and chucking yourself on the ground type of games. Netball doesn't have to be totally girly, you know, like a bit pathetic with the throwing but, um, with football and rugby it's different. They are more physical really. A real tomboy sort of a thing to do. I never wanted to be classed as that, like in a tracksuit with short hair. Me ... I was sporty but still feminine.....I did my hair Always neat ...proper clothes (Beth).

Several issues emerge from Beth's comments. It seems, for example, that engagement in female-appropriate sports contributes to the inculcation of more restrictive, perhaps more hesitant bodily movements in physical activity (Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton, 1992; Young, 1990;). Furthermore, there is evidence that more men than women learn aggressively how to fight for and control space (Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Dunning,

1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Massey, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Scraton, 1992; Young, 1990;). Beth was averse to boisterous, aggressive physicality. An insightful and useful examination of the embodiment of femininity is offered in Young's (1990) work on (Western) female experiences of physical activity. In sports, she claims, sometimes, though not always, women's bodily actions tend to be more restrained than men's. Some women, then, tend to have a more restricted physical capacity, and a less committed approach to physicality. Her observations support the idea that physical activity is a site for the inculcation of a gendered body habitus. Sporting practices provide a context for the creation of particular dispositions towards femininity and masculinity. Having said that, Young (1990) points out that in physical activity there is the possibility of realising the limits of a gendered body habitus, and of advancing the potential for alternative bodily experiences and expressions. Young (1990) also emphasises that her comments about female feelings of bodily restriction will not apply equally to all women. Indeed, some men may experience their bodies in a similar way to some women and vice versa. Young's (1990) work is useful here in that it highlights the idea that some aspects of gendered identification are both different and shared between, and within, groups of women and men.

The idea that appearance related concerns characterise these women's attitudes to their bodies and towards physical activity is also captured in Beth's previous comment. Beth explains that a "tracksuit" and "short hair" signalled the 'look' of a "tomboy". In this example, particular sports clothing is not associated with femininity. To some extent, laying claim to an appropriate feminine identity is based upon appearance. Furthermore, for Beth, participating in some sports was not necessarily conducive to the construction of a feminine identity. In order to engage in physical activity and still lay claim to a feminine identity girls and women like Beth have developed a preference for

female-appropriate exercise, and more specifically, cosmetic fitness. At the same time these women manage their appearance through an array of beauty regimes. Charlie illustrated this point when she said "I like my hair to look niceI wear quite tight clothes ...to show off my shapeand some basic eye make-up". Such a comment indicates that some women choose exercise, 'do' their hair, wear make-up, and select clothing, that signifies femininity.

In terms of the habituation of a feminine body habitus, Elias's ideas about the civilizing of parents are also of use. It can be argued, for example, that the organisation of physical activity for girls and the prevailing attitudes of parents, teachers and coaches to girls' involvement in sport and exercise reflect the anxiety stimulated in adults "whenever the structure of their own drives, and with it their own social existence and the social order in which it is anchored, is even remotely threatened." (Elias, 2000, p. 141). What this means is that there is a high degree of emotion surrounding the parenting of children. More specifically, such emotion is invoked when children are being taught the ways of the adult world to which their parents subscribe. Some of women in this study illuminated the parental emotionality surrounding the gender training of children in and through physical activity. Fiona, for example, explained her mother and father's approach, attitude and emotional responses to her involvement in physical activity in the following way:

My parents decided I was going to be a ballet dancer, well my Mum did. I was a bit of tomboy playing football in the village and wearing jeans and t-shirts. I think Mum wanted me to be very ladylike. She was a bit dismissive of me playing football. They never came to a sports day or watched me play football. Mum came to see me dance. And although Dad says he's not sexist, he is. He complains about women drivers and likes the idea of the man being head of the

household, you know. He hasn't ever said women can't play football but I get that impression (Fiona).

It seems, from these comments, that adult regulation of childhood physical activity was significant in shaping these women's perceptions of femininity and attitudes towards physical activity. Regulative practices included verbal and non-verbal reinforcement, and prohibition. Important in the regulation of children are the things that parents both *do* say and do, and *do not* say and do. As Fiona highlighted, her parents did not attend her football matches and presented an image of emotional blankness about her involvement in the sport. Yet, they were present at her dance displays. This provided Fiona with a message that dance, was a more appropriate activity for her.

The parent-child relationship, then, is characterised by authority. While the practice of raising children reflects different degrees of authority and there is evidence of increasingly egalitarian approaches to parenting characterised by a trend towards equality between parents and children, the balance of power still rests, at first, with the parents (Elias, 1998c). Elias (1998c) explains that the group characteristics of parent-child relationships broadly reflect civilizing processes towards self-restraint of emotions and bodily functions. However, evident within this broad pattern, parenting is differentiated along ethnic, class, and for the purposes of this discussion, gender lines. The role of parents and adults in the parent-child relationship is in guiding children through the processes of becoming an adult. This requires the development of a high degree of foresight and self-control. In terms of the formation of feminine habitus and identities, the development of girls into adult women requires some foresight regarding what counts as acceptably adult female conduct and feminine appearance.

It appears that women's early involvement in physical activity can make a significant contribution to the inculcation of feminine characteristics such as grace,

physical inferiority and the conventional 'laws' of feminine beauty. Physical activity is "ideologically laden" and significant in the production, inculcation and expression of gender identities (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 189). As girls, some of the women I have spoken with had learned discriminatory attitudes and beliefs about what does and does not count as a feminine. Evident in Beth's previous remarks is an aversion to aggressive behaviour, actions likely to involve physical contact, force or bodily harm, and an appearance that does not comply with conventional ideas about feminine beauty.

The ideology of thin, slender female bodies that I have identified at the fitness gym may also illustrate a particular, western, cultural distaste for fat. Following Hargreaves (1994, p. 161), for example, while the idealised image of female thinness has become somewhat "homogenized – across class, ethnic and age divisions, it has little relevance to working class women, or to women from different ethnic groups". All of the women in my study were white and British. In addition, their employment status and family backgrounds indicated middle-class tendencies. These women were teachers, administrators, managers, sport and health practitioners, and trainees for such occupations. For Laberge and Sankoff (1988) the dispositions towards and perceptions of physical activity are quite specific for middle class women. Most common exercise practices include "calisthenics" and also "swimming and aerobics, "jazzercise", or "work-out" activities (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988, p. 279). Working-out was the preferred exercise activity of the women in this study. To some extent, then, their choice of exercise signalled a middle class (Western) feminine body habitus.

Featherstone (1991) also explores the class predispositions towards particular types of exercise and specific attitudes towards the body. He notes that there has been a "triumph of the thin woman over the fat woman" in the twentieth century (Featherstone, 1991, p. 184). He argues that the dominant message of thinness is

orientated to a new middle class that he refers to as the petit bourgeoisie. According to Featherstone (1991) then, body maintenance and the powerful rhetoric of female thinness are predominantly relevant to the new petit bourgeoisie who are particularly motivated by anxieties about the shape and size of their bodies.

The women I observed and interviewed participated in activities that could be identified as characteristic of the lifestyle of middle-class women. They demonstrated a middle class conditioning where great importance is attached to physical appearance. In other words, exercise and bodily disciplines such as dieting are self-imposed rules of behaviour (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988, p. 280). Following Bourdieu's conception of habitus, Laberge and Sankoff (1988) contend that the rationale for such physical superiority is founded on the exchange value that appearance has in the work place. Apparently, for middle-class females, "professional 'success'" is largely a function of their "image" (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988, p. 280). This point certainly has merit. Yet, in terms of gender, status hierarchies are not solely manifest in the work place. There are particular status rivalries that I have identified in the context of the gym that are significant in the development of a feminine body habitus. I revisit the production of feminine identities and habitus in the unequal power relations at the fitness gym later on in this chapter. Emphasised here, however, is the idea that at the gym, as well as in wider social contexts, the status / success of some women is, to a large extent, measured on their feminine body habitus. In this study, such a body habitus is part and parcel of middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and white version of femininity.

What has been principally at issue in this section is the way in which some women have "commonly and formatively" experienced their bodies through concerns about appearance (McDermott 2000, p. 342). The women I have interviewed illustrated a shared taste for cosmetic fitness activities. They preferred the slender, toned images

of the female body-beautiful. Working-out, then, provided them with an opportunity to realise their predisposition towards the slim, tight physique that characterises their sense of femininity. The ability of some women to absorb appropriate exercise behaviours, and to sculpt preferred female body images is fundamental to the development of, and claim to, an appropriate feminine identity. It should be emphasised that the precise reproduction of gendered behaviour and appearance is never assured (Shilling, 1991). There is always a chance that some girls and women may, in varying degrees, resist accepted ideals of femininity. Feelings of bodily restriction will not apply equally, or exclusively to all women (Young, 1990). Some females may not experience high levels of positive reinforcement to accommodate socially acceptable standards of feminine conduct. Some girls and women may not experience a great deal of negativity from being involved in physical activity more generally considered to be antithetical to feminine values, conduct and appearance. It is useful, at this point, to draw on Elias's (1991a, p. 182) explanation that the social habitus is the "soil" from which different personalities grow. In terms of gender, a feminine body habitus is the soil from which different femininities grow. Put another way, the feminine body habitus evident in individual female exercisers in this study, is at the same time individualised by such women.

To further understand the multi-layered character of the feminine body habitus I have identified, it is necessary to re-visit the gender / power relations at the fitness gym. So, the next section re-examines the dynamics of 'We' images of femininity and their connection with individual 'I' images in the unequal and shifting power balances that characterise the relationships between exercisers.

6.5 Established-Outsider Relations and I/We Images of Femininity

Elias's work on established-outsider relations can shed light on the complexities of gendered identity and gendered inequality. For Mennell (1994, p. 180), one of the central tenets of Elias's ideas was "The mutual conditioning of processes of meaning and power". Already noted is the idea that Elias' conceptualisations of identity and habitus are useful as a basis for understanding differences between people. There is a direct connection between habitus and identity formation and power relations. The ingrained dimensions of habitus make them the foundation upon which difference and potential conflict are based. What I mean is that the characteristics of the habitus of one's own group are conceived as 'natural' and proper, whereas different components of habitus in others are perceived to be 'unnatural', faulty and worthy of criticism and blame. In terms of gender studies, emphasising the concept of difference has become central to understanding diversity amongst women and men in sport (Birrell, 2002; Carrington, 2002; Caudwell, 1999; Connell, 2000; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 2000; Scraton, 2001; Wray, 2002). Yet, the uncritical acceptance of the notion of difference in feminist studies can be questioned. Let me briefly say why this is the case before examining how Elias's ideas can contribute to the debate.

Feminist research that emphasises the multitude of subject positions that characterise 'the individual' presents difficulties in terms of critically exploring power relations and identity politics. For Maynard (2002), arguments founded on the idea that human societies can only be understood as an amalgam of different individuals and groups presents 'difference' as operating at one level whereby all forms of diversity are simply explained by a single phenomenon, *difference*. Such a position also restricts any potential for presenting interpretations beyond the level of the particular. Overall, there is a tendency to emphasise difference, in terms of experience and character, at the

expense of those aspects of gendered identity and habitus that might be shared. But, as previously noted, figural scholars, like some feminists, explain that similarity, as well as diversity, is significant in the formation of identities (Elias, 1978; Hargreaves, 2000; Maynard, 2002; Mennell, 1994).

Following the work of Atvar Brah (1991, 1992), Maynard (2002) advocates the recognition and examination of struggles between and within groups as a way to better understand the formation of distinctive and collective aspects of gendered identities. She refers to such an approach as a “politics of *identification*” (Maynard, 2002, p. 120). Such a view also reflects the centrality of power in the formation of gendered identities. Given that Elias (1978) emphasised that processes of identification are characterised by power relations, I argue that his work is fruitful in advancing knowledge about gender, identities and sport and exercise. The sensitivity to difference in some gender studies is implicit in Elias’s notion of what Mennell (1994, p. 184) calls the “nexus of power and identity”. What has been particularly useful in understanding the construction of femininities in the fitness gym, is Elias’s explanation of the dynamics of *We* images and their relationship with personal self-images, in unequal power ratios between groups (Mennell, 1994). Let me try to explain.

There is a direct connection between the “multi-perspectival character” of gender (Elias, 1978, p. 127) and the game models explored in Chapters 2 and 5. Previous references to two-person gender games at the fitness gym, and the power ratios between exercisers, have also illustrated that the relationship, say between woman A and woman B, as seen from A’s perspective and from B’s perspective. These perspectives are associated with maintaining the established-outsider relations between, and within, groups of women in the gym as they seek to sculpt preferred images of the

female body-beautiful. A summary of some previous examples will serve to illustrate my point.

It was shown in Chapter 5 that established female exercisers were relatively empowered in the fitness gym. Established women were able to monopolize particular corporeal resources. In the gym, they controlled the use of equipment identified as important in 'burning' body fat, and tightening muscles. In the exercise classes, insider participants dominated the physical space around the instructor, impairing the view of outsiders and, thus, jeopardising the potential of the latter in mastering particular exercise techniques. Furthermore, established women had a monopoly over exercise and body knowledge. The tendency for established exercisers to work-out with other insiders retained such knowledge within the privileged group. There is a link between such power relations and the formation of feminine identities. What I mean is, the monopolization of corporeal resources is linked to the observation that established exercisers developed an ideology that presented outsider bodies as 'unfit', 'ugly', 'gross', 'bad' and 'fat'. In other words, a collective and inferior 'They' image / identity was constructed in the context of the gossip networks at the gym. Blame gossip was characterised by derogatory comments and negative emotions about overweight', and 'out-of-shape' bodies. At the same time, it is through gossip that exercisers demonstrate their adherence to the slender, toned (preferred) 'We' ideals of female beauty. Praise gossip was characterised by flattery and respect for 'fit', 'slender' and 'tight' female bodies.

The twin concepts of group charisma and group disgrace previously introduced in Chapter 5 can also be harnessed in understanding the nexus of power, identity and femininity in the fitness gym. I have observed that established female exercisers felt relatively secure in, and proud of their corporeal superiority. They expressed a sense of

gratification in their mastery of exercise and the achievement of feminine body ideals. Concomitant with the creation of group charisma, by and for established female exercisers, is the construction and internalisation of group disgrace by outsiders. An unfavourable collective We image was internalised into the image that outsider women had of themselves. Outsiders themselves felt 'unfit', 'ugly', 'gross', 'bad' and 'fat'. Yet, it is not the case that female bodies are simply either / or in terms of fit / unfit, fat / thin, ugly / beautiful, and good / bad. At the gym, a complexity of idealised female body images develops in relation to unequal power relations. Tension and conflict characterise the struggles to control corporeal ideals of femininity at the fitness gym. Such tensions are most evident when some women use, and display, their bodies in ways that do not conform to acceptable ideals of the female body-beautiful. Fat and overly muscular female bodies are two examples that construct such corporeal conflict. Next, I explain how such examples also serve to illustrate further that the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities are connected to the power balances between and within groups of exercisers.

The example of the instructor / client relationship provided in Chapter 5 demonstrated that, when the power ratio between established and outsider exercisers is very unequal, it is difficult for outsider females to escape their inferior position. In such conditions, it is most likely that outsider women who work-out develop a We image that mirrors the inferior corporeal status constructed for them by established exercisers. Put simply, outsider women at the gym are stigmatised in terms of their appearance and physical performance. Yet it was also emphasised that power ratios are never static. Rather, balances of power shift, in varying degrees and at different paces, towards more, and less even power ratios (Elias, 1978). In Elias's work, the process by which

power ratios among groups of people become more relatively equal is referred to as functional democratisation (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998, p. 23).

I have explained that in situations of decreasing power ratios at the gym, there is evidence of broadening definitions of femininity. So, for example, the sense of inferiority that might be felt in relation to alternative, say muscular, female bodies is weakened to some extent. At the same time that there is evidence of a reduction in inequality between established and outsider females at the gym, new corporeal inequalities between women do emerge. As yet, for example, the acceptance of fat bodies is far from secure. Fat bodies are relatively powerless in terms of defining an alternative or transgressive sense of femininity in the gym. Nevertheless, the evidence from this study so far points to the idea that some highly unequal power relations can and do shift towards outsider women. In situations where power ratios are becoming more equal, people are more likely to identify with the behaviours and emotions of others. This is one aspect of a civilizing process that Elias (2000) refers to as the habit of foresight. Taking more conscious account of one's own behaviour in relation to that of other people is significant in terms of human identification (Elias, 2000; Mennell, 1992; 1994). Indeed, Mennell (1992, p. 102) explains that part of the process of foresight can also be described in terms of "a higher level of identification" or "mutual identification". In the fitness gym, exercisers are constantly aware of how their exercise behaviours and corporeal appearance might be interpreted by others. As previously discussed, for the women I have interviewed, concerns about what others think are based on ideas about what counts as a feminine 'look'. The next section examines how the habit of foresight is significant in the construction and reconstruction of femininities in the fitness gym.

6.6 The Fitness Gym, Foresight and Gender Identification

For Elias (2000), in situations where social relationships are increasing in complexity, there is more pressure for people to constantly attune their behaviour to that of other people. This he refers to as the “pressure for foresight” (Elias, 2000, p. 379). A pressure for foresight is evident in the gendered relationships at the fitness gym. Such an observation lends support to the idea that the civilized forms of behaviour that Elias (1983, 2000) discusses are reflected in contemporary society (Burkitt, 1999). For some women, for example, the quest for a superior female physique requires constant and conscious account of how their bodies and their exercise behaviour will be interpreted by others. A conversation between a group of women who had just completed an exercise class illustrated this point. As these women changed from their work-out clothing, showered and re-dressed, they discussed their performance in the class, and their appearance in the following way:

(Deborah) I was better this week wasn't I?

(Ellen) You are good really you are not as bad as you think ... you keep up and you can do it all.

(Deborah) How did I look? You two always look great.

(Michelle) God, you've lost weight

(Deborah) No !

(Michelle) Yeah you look really good

(Ellen) You're not that bad looking either (she whispered). You're not as bad as that girl in the leggings. (Ellen looks at the girl in the leggings, raises her eyebrows. Deborah tells them to Ssh! The conversation stops abruptly).

These comments highlight that some women are intensely aware of how they and others look and perform in the fitness gym. Several of the interviewees in this study

were explicit about how they attuned their exercise behaviour to that of other exercisers. For example, Anna said "I look to see what the 'fit' people doYou know, I ask themlike I got Charlie to write me a programme (of exercise) ...that's the way to get the body". Anna's comments highlight the connection between particular exercise practices and the development of the female body-beautiful. She introduces the importance of taking conscious account of one's own exercise habits in terms of constructing a 'look' deemed to be feminine.

Fiona offered some further insight into the relationships between foresight and feminine identification. Noting that some women observe the appearance and performance of other women in the gym, she said: "we all do ityou knowwatch what women do in the gym". When I asked her to explain what exactly women were looking at in the context of the gym, and why such observations took place she said "well ...you look to see who looks good ...and what exercise they do to get the look". But, importantly, she added: "actually ...its' not just at the gym ...you look at the magazines and TV and all of that ...you see the models and thinkthey have just got it". Fiona's comments indicate that while the boundaries of foresight and feminine identification might, at first sight, appear to be narrowly confined to the gym, this is not the case. The relationships that exercisers have with others who work-out are connected to a wider network of fitness relationships. The exercise body-beautiful complex defined in the Introduction is an attempt to demonstrate the wider scope of processes of feminine identification. The gym is a place where feminine exercise identities and feminine body habituses are formed and reformed. Yet, key personnel in the media, medical institutions, diet industries, sport sciences and health and fitness industries also reinforce popular images of feminine beauty.

There is a link between the civilizing tendency towards foresight and the development of civilized bodies. Processes of foresight are reflected in the formation of (western) civilized bodies that are, at the same time, characterised by self-restraint and rationalization (Burkitt, 1991, 1999; Shilling, 1993). Emphasised here is the idea that gendered civilized bodies develop in the context of exercise. Specifically, there is a connection between working out, civilized bodies, feminine identification and the inculcation and perpetuation of a feminine body habitus. These links are founded upon the fact that the internalisation of feminine dispositions takes place in the context of a struggle for status (Elias, 1983). In the quest for superior physiques, civilized female bodies reflect the internalisation of higher degrees of self-restraint, engagement in more firmly regulated exercise behaviour, and the adoption of a greater degree of foresight in relation to the body, exercise and dietary regimes.

There is a link between working-out and the formation of feminine identities and habitus made earlier in this chapter. Being able to absorb appropriate exercise behaviours, and to sculpt preferred female body images is fundamental to the development of, and claim to an appropriate feminine identity. The requirement for lean, muscularly toned female bodies in the gym is related to the value that it affords women who work out. The body-beautiful is status enhancing and is revered by both women and men at the gym and in a wider social context. Let me examine this issue further.

In terms of the connection between the internalisation of feminine exercise behaviours, and feminine appearance and the "search for distinction", my findings reveal a pressure for women to refine their corporeal appearance according to established ideals of femininity (Shilling, 1993, p. 157). Such a pressure is not directly imposed by external force. Rather, external pressures to look and behave in an acceptably feminine manner have become internalised. Evidence for this point comes from comments such

as "I control my body automaticallyI subconsciously choose the least fattening food constantly check my weight And will always have exercise as just part of my life" (Eva). Furthermore, the pressure to attune one's exercise behaviour and bodily appearance towards ideals of fitness and femininity is associated with winning the respect of others both in the gym and in wider cultural contexts. Feeling "worthless" (Eva) and "completely unconfident" (Charlie) were common when the women interviewed had gained excess fat. Expressions of euphoria, pride and pleasure were expressed when these women attracted attention from others because they were slim and toned. It seems that ideals of femininity are contingent upon bodily shape, weight and size. In the gym, and other social settings, slim, muscularly toned, shapely and petite female physiques count in terms of gaining respect from other people.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are many images of femininity, it is argued that contemporary female beauty is characterised by lean, muscularly toned (fit) female bodies. This is the female body ideal that women who work-out at fitness gyms seek to develop. Such bodies represent success and can be defined as higher status female bodies. High status and low status women are differentiated, to a large extent, on the basis of their bodily appearance and performance. Women's status in the gym, then, is based on a rationalized command of the techniques, practices and rituals of exercise, as well as the development of a physique that fits the ideals of the female body-beautiful. This idea reflects some of Elias's (1983) comments about refinements in expressive behaviour in the context of European court societies in the Renaissance period. In fifteenth and sixteenth century court societies, for example, advancing standards of polite behaviour, and the attunement of behaviour to that of others were associated with gaining respect (Elias, 1983). Arguably, this study of a contemporary fitness gym illustrates that such civilizing processes are still at work. Furthermore, it is argued that

such civilizing processes involve a gendered dimension. I have observed that both women and men carefully manage their 'outward' appearance and 'inner' fitness. Indeed, such body management is salient in the status enhancement of all exercisers. As discussed in Chapter 5, it was more usual that women engaged in exercise regimes designed to reduce the size of their bodies, as well as to sculpt a shapely, petite physique. Women tended to invest more time in continual rhythmic exercise such as stepping, power walking, and exercise to music classes. Similarly, women, rather than men, could be observed engaging in muscle-shaping, regimes as opposed to muscle building exercises. The rationale for female-appropriate exercise is founded on the promise of fat reduction, improved muscle tightness, and shapely, small muscles. The consequence of weight (fat) loss, and the construction of shapely muscles, is the enhancement of status in the gym. The acquisition of a slim, tight female physique serves to gain the respect of others, and due to habitus issues, contributes to improved self-respect.

Recognising that there are connections between increasing foresight and processes of identification is one way of understanding the production and reproduction of feminine identities and habitus in the gym environment. I wish to explore this link in more detail. Three particular dimensions of foresight seem to shed light on gender identification at the fitness gym: the process of "psychologization"; the process of "rationalization"; and, advancing "thresholds of shame and embarrassment" (Mennell, 1992, p. 101). Some specific examples from my interviews and observations will serve to illustrate these processes at work.

6.7 Fitness, Feminine Identities and Psychologization

As has been shown, establishing and maintaining a high status body requires foresight. The value associated with contemporary (Western) ideals of female and male

beauty demand that women and men continually monitor their appearance. Observing their own and other's bodies and behaviour exemplifies the civilizing tendency towards psychologization. As I have argued, processes of feminine identification are characterised by the way in which some women take account of the consequences of their own and others' actions and appearance. The pressure and habit for foresight in the fitness gym comes with a particular way of considering other exercisers. An individual's image of other exercisers is shaped by observation and experience. These women have a "psychological' view" of themselves and others that is developed by processes of observation and experience (Shilling, 1993, p. 159). They consciously construct and re-construct their bodies via processes of perpetual surveillance. As Fiona highlighted: "people are always watching ... it's this feeling of being watched ... I think it's the body thingthe physical appearance ...pressure to look good...and to learn a technique".

In establishing and maintaining a superior, higher status female physique, some women are involved in very precise observations of their own and others' bodies. Beth, for example, explained such precise surveillance when she observed: "when I look at Dina I think she is ever so lean. I really notice all her lovely definition...shoulders, stomach, arms, legs, and hardly any fat....". Beth also explained the way in which women looked at other women's bodies as markers of their own bodily achievements when she said "We (women) look at each other And compare ...you know where you are at when you look aroundyou might thinkI'd like to be as lean or fit as thator she looks betterit keeps you coming to the gym". When I asked her to explain why observing high status female physiques was a motivating factor in her work-out regime she replied: "well that's the image you wantyou see ityou know you can get thereit spurs you on, having the image in front of you". Such comments indicate

that a distinct type of rivalry exists between women in some exercise figurations in their quest for the body-beautiful. Chapter 5 explored aspects of gender power relations and the body-beautiful. Here, it is re-stated that these women do not compete against others by use of force or in economic terms but by "status competition" (Shilling, 1993, p. 159). Looking good holds value because it brings with it the promise of favourable attention from others and feelings of improved self-esteem. Let me provide some specific examples.

Fiona illustrated the corporeal value of the body-beautiful, saying, "It's amazing ...a good body makes you feel sexy and confident". Anna, reinforced these ideas about the status of a superior physique in terms of heterosexual attractiveness, explaining "Men find it [the look] attractive and that's the subconscious thing in the back of my mind because we [women] still want to be attractive to men, and so it's important to look feminine. Attractiveness is the key". Eva explained that it was important that both women and men considered her attractive saying "I want my husband to think I am sexybut you don't want to feel unattractive in the eyes of other womenit's a respect thing there, not a sex thing". Charlie echoed the sentiments of my other interviewees when she said "deep down, everyone does this [body work] so you look good for other peopleit's kind of a status thing". When I asked her if she wanted to look good for men she replied: "yesbut women too ...I am more worried what women think in the gym ...if they say you look good ...you feel good".

These comments support the idea that the acquisition of the slim, muscularly toned physique is a marker of value in the lives of some women, and is significant in the construction and maintenance of a stable sense of feminine identity. Furthermore, they serve to illustrate that processes of psychologization are linked to the status rivalries that exist between established and outsider women in the gym. Working-out is, in part,

based on observing one's own and other's bodies, and attuning one's exercise behaviour in order to achieve a higher status physique. Precise corporeal observations are connected with the motives for working-out in the fitness gym. Over time, women's observations and experience become less spontaneous and more purposive. Increasingly purposive observation is a key feature of the civilizing process of psychologization. For the women I have interviewed, the purpose of continual and precise observation of bodies in the gym, is to monitor and manage their bodies. The underpinning rationale for female body management is the desire for status. As discussed, status enhancement is a consequence of a superior body image. The management of female bodies in the fitness gym is related to the civilizing process of foresight in terms of rationality or the logic of working-out. Next, I wish to comment on rationalization, fitness and feminine identities.

6.8 The Fitness Gym, Female Bodies and Work-Out Rationality

In terms of understanding gender, identification and the fitness gym, it has been useful to consider Elias's (1983, 2000) discussion of rationalization in the development and emergence of the distinctive personality of the court. The concept of rationalization is, perhaps, more closely associated with the work of Max Weber who, broadly speaking, presented two types of rationality: formal or purposive rationality, and substantive or value rationality (Marshall, 1998). Formal rationality can be defined as the extent of quantitative calculation in determining needs, and is synonymous with bourgeois-economic rationality. Value rationality represents a type of provisioning according to some value system, such as status, egalitarianism or social justice. Weber contended that the highest form of rationalization was the formal type that was associated with the bourgeois strata. Such a claim represents a point of departure

between Weber's thinking on rationalization and that of Elias (1983). Let me briefly explain why this is the case.

According to Elias (2000, p. 406) "*court-rationality*" was characterised by the way in which power was invested in people and prestige, rather than economic potential. Court-rationality represents a specific type of value rationality. But, contra Weber, Elias (1983; 2000) contends that no one group is the originator of rationalization. Shifts towards more rational modes of conduct and emotion arise in terms of the tension balances between and within groups in particular social settings. For Elias (1983, 2000), processes of rationalization occur as external compulsions have increasingly become internalised since the sixteenth century. One feature of such internalisation processes is the constant tension between rationality and irrationality (Mennell, 1992). The rationality / irrationality balance is the tension that exists (internally) between reality-congruent modes of thought and short-term affectual thinking. Whatever the context, rationalization is defined in terms of a control of short-term affective behaviour for the achievement of longer-term goals, specific to a particular social setting, but related to competition for power, prestige and capital.

Drawing on Elias's (1983, 2000) ideas about rationalization, it appears that there is a specific logic, or rationality to working-out at the fitness gym. I argue that a work-out rationality is evident in the gym. There is evidence of a type of rationality whereby the body, and more specifically, superior physiques represent the instruments of power. Dina, for example introduced this idea to me when she said: "I work out to look good ...and perform in athletics ...it's not just about performanceyou try and impress people with your physiquewhat you look likeit's (the 'look') got more kudosthat's why I work out". These comments introduce the idea that exercise behaviour reflects rational modes of thought about how working-out might develop a physique

worthy of the respect of others. This point was further illustrated in an informal conversation with one gym member who described the fitness gym as a “body shop” (Helen). When I asked her what she meant by the term she said: “well ...you go there to get the body everyone wants”. Helen’s comments support my observation that there is a rationalized approach to working out that is founded on the superior status of slim, toned female bodies.

A disciplined approach to regular exercise and restriction of dietary intake are necessary preconditions of success and prestige in the fitness gym. Fiona illustrated this point when she said “I really admire women who just go for it ...you know ...up early ...exercise and diet ...always made up and looking nice”. Her admiration was based on her perception that a disciplined approach to body management would result in the acquisition of a body ideal that counted as feminine. For her, such women had “just got it” in terms of “femininity”, “status”, and “beauty”. Charlie supported the idea that status in the gym was based on exercise and dietary discipline by explaining that “you look at the girls who look lean ...they are the disciplined ones You look what exercise they dothey are the ones you compare yourself to”. These women perpetually attune their exercise behaviour to that of others in the quest for the body-beautiful. Such planned exercise behaviour is part and parcel of the construction and reconstruction of particular exercise identities that I argue are gendered. So, for the women I have interviewed, feminine exercise identities and body habituses are produced in relation to a work-out rationality.

Work-out rationality is characterised by “affect charged modes of thought and action” (Elias, 1991a, p. 82). Yet, for Elias (2000) ‘rational’ forms of behaviour can only develop when external controls over behaviour and affect become increasing self-controlled. Increasing rationality involves the deferment of short-term emotions for the

achievement of longer-term goals. Anna captured this idea, complaining that “sometimes it’s so hard....to do the sessionto not eat too much ...but you know that it’s worth it ...to look better”. Beth, Grace and Charlie echoed Anna’s sentiments. Beth sighed deeply as told me that “it’s difficult to train sometimes ...when you are hungry ...tired ...but if you don’t....well I put on weightso you push yourself through the dizzy spells”. Grace explained “it’s an effortalways....I mean I love my food toobut it’s worth working hardso you look better”. Charlie also expressed a sense of despondency at the relentless pursuit of a particular physique by explaining that “sometimes I find it hardto get motivatedand sometimes exercise hurts”. Nevertheless, Charlie also illustrated that the short-term pain of the exercise regime led to longer-term gains in fitness and appearance when she added: “but I think, well, that’s half an hour and a few calories burned....got to do ithave to do itto get the body”.

The comments above demonstrate the sense of deferred gratification in working-out. Working out is both a pain and a pleasure. These women are able to endure short-term feelings of discomfort, fatigue, pain and shame for the greater (longer-term) feelings of confidence, esteem and gratification in achieving high status physiques. Calculations about gains and losses in corporeal status, then, are dominant in the ‘rational’ control of exercise behaviour. Eva captured this idea quite explicitly when she said “exercise keeps me fit and slim....in shape ...keeps everything toned up ...in controlthat’s makes me feel attractive ...other people think it looks good ...that’s the point of exercise”. For women who work-out, then, longer-term feelings are dictated by the rationality of the fitness gym. It seems that idealised images of the body-beautiful have a social effectiveness. Images of the body-beautiful serve to maintain the existence and rationality of working-out. Yet, there is another mechanism by which female bodies are managed in the fitness gym that also reflects civilizing processes at

work. There is a link between the management of female bodies in the fitness gym and feelings of shame and embarrassment. I explore these connections below.

6.9 Fitness, Femininities and Corporeal Shame and Embarrassment

For some women who work-out, the careful, and precise monitoring and management of the body is connected to feelings of shame and embarrassment that, for Elias (2000), have been advancing in people in the West since the 16th century. The feeling of shame is a fear of social degradation. A fear that one's own behaviour will elicit disapproval or contempt by other people, or will cause others to exert their authority in some way. My interviews reveal that the potential for some women's bodies to appear unattractive or un-feminine produces feelings of anxiety in the form of "shame-fear" (Elias, 2000, p. 414). Some brief examples will illustrate this point.

When Eva was explaining how she felt about putting on weight she made her feelings of shame clear. Shaking her head as she remembered her experiences she explained that "I felt awful when I got quite overweightmy aunt commented that I had a big bottom oncenow I worry about putting on weight". Grace explained her anxieties about her body by saying "when you get bad comments ...you do feel bada girl said my legs were too big onceit does have an impact". The effect of having a body that does not match up to ideals of female beauty was clearly expressed by both Beth and Charlie who visibly recoiled in disgust at the thought of putting on weight (fat). These women shook their heads and looked at me in horror when asked about how they felt about weight gain. Both Beth and Charlie expressed a "fear" about putting on weight, or getting too muscley. When I asked Charlie what she feared she said "feeling uncomfortable physicallybut also you don't want anyone else to comment badly". These comments capture the fear that some women feel in knowing that their bodies might not match corporeal ideals of femininity. They also serve to illustrate that, having

internalised, superior ideals for female bodies, some women experience shame-fear about their own bodily imperfections.

Feelings of embarrassment operate in a similar manner to shame-fear and, are inseparable from feelings of shame. The difference is that embarrassment is provoked by the behaviour of another person. Women who work-out feel embarrassed about other women and men who did not display acceptable bodies. During one participant observation Anna was working-out with a friend and came over to me to point out a woman who was fat and wearing clothing that revealed her body. She whispered "why is she wearing that ? you would have thought she would cover up. It's embarrassing". Fiona confirmed this idea when she was talking about women exercisers who were overweight. She said: "I think that it's best for fatter women to come when the gym is quieter I mean it means that other people don't look at them and kind of feel embarrassed for them". Expressions of disdain and disapproval characterise feelings of embarrassment. As was shown in Chapter 5, such feelings are elicited at seeing 'other' imperfect bodies, and expressions of embarrassment characterise the gossip networks of the fitness gym.

Following Mennell (1992), there is a connection between feelings of shame and the formation of I / We images and identities. The women in this study who felt ashamed of their bodies could not escape the feeling. Eva, for example, vividly remembered that she felt ashamed, embarrassed and inferior when a female relative made derogatory comments about her physique. Taking a deep breath she explained that "I still remember itmy aunt said I had a big bottomI did feel badawful ...but it was trueand I went on a diet didn't I?". Beth supported the idea of an internalised sense of inferiority associated with an out-of-shape physique when she said "I know when I have put on weightCharlie grabbed my spare flesh on my tummy the other dayI

hate thatwish she wouldn't I'm embarrassed but she's right I need to lose some". It seems that these women acknowledge and accept their own inferiority. Transgressing against socially accepted feminine behaviour and appearance also serves to threaten a woman's sense of (heterosexual) feminine identity. Dina, for example, explained that a lean and toned body made her feel "more womanly ...and feminine", and that an excessively muscular physique would make her feel "masculinelike a bloke". Eva and Beth also supported the idea that one's sense of femininity is challenged when one deviates from female body ideals by saying "If you are a bit of a bloateryou don't feel sexy ...or feminine...or like a woman" (Eva) and "Being slim is feminineI don't feel attractive if I put on weightyou don't want to go outor be seenI am embarrassed by my sisterwho is really overweight". Feelings of shame and embarrassment are a feature of the emotional relationships these women have with their own bodies, as well as the emotionally charged nature of their feminine identification.

While all of the women interviewed revealed an internal sense of fear and distress about their bodily imperfections, such feelings were not directly observable. Shame is not always evident in the presence of others (Elias, 2000, p. 415). Nevertheless, the fear of social degradation associated with outsider female body images directed the women in this study towards cosmetic fitness and restricted dietary regimes for developing the slender, toned ideals of the higher status 'look'. In terms of feminine identification, it seems that fears and anxieties about the body represent the hinge by which a feminine body habitus and feminine identity are inculcated. The women in this study have learned, through long term processes in several social contexts including sport and exercise, to be ashamed of deviating from appropriately feminine behaviours, beliefs and appearances. Anxieties about the body and participation in sport and exercise are developed early in both girls and boys. Having their roots, as Elias

(2000, p. 415) notes, in “physical compulsion, in the bodily inferiority of the child in face of its parents or teachers” automatic feelings of anxiety are reproduced in social contexts that construct a fear of social degradation in relation to bodily appearance. Fiona, for example, reflected on an experience of gaining weight at about the age of ten. She said:

I just remember coming home after one term at ballet school and my Mum saying I'd put on a stone. And I don't know why but it made quite an impact on me. Just the way it was said, you know, sort of in a way to make me feel bad. And you know how something imprints on you and you think about it? Well ever since then, well, not always but my weight has been a bit of an issue. It wasn't until later that I got into awkward bizarre eating habits and exercise. I'm not suggesting that Mum was the reason for that but I just remember the feelings I had then. Not looking right and wishing I did (Fiona).

In this reflection, the shame felt by Fiona when her body was not of an appropriate shape and size is a consequence of her mother's comments. Other peoples' perceptions are significant in the internalisation and habituation of feelings of shame and embarrassment (Elias, 2000). It was previously discussed that Eva (aged 39) held enduring memories of embarrassment about her body associated with the negative comments of a family member when she was 16 years old. Beth also illustrated the impact of others and especially a sports coach in eliciting feelings of shame about the body when she said:

My coach at gym used to check our diets. And I felt bad that I was too heavy to be used for demonstrations. I was conscious that all the others were skinny and I wasn't. And I did get skinny because I was conscious of not looking right for the sport and for a girl. And then I was like them (the other girls). And when I went

back to gym club once I was so light and he (the coach) could use me for demonstrations (Beth).

These feelings of shame and / or anxiety are expressed in relation to the perception of others and correlate with situations where the women have behaved, or appeared, in a way that contradicts established and accepted group norms of femininity. At the same time, contradictory action and appearance is defined by the part of these women's consciousness and unconsciousness through which they control themselves. These women have, from an early age, internalised a feminine social habitus characterised by self-restraint towards acceptable feminine behaviour and appearance. Feelings of shame reflect a conflict between individual and prevalent social opinion, but also a conflict with that dimension of the individual that represents such a social opinion.

This section has attempted to examine the ways in which some of Elias's ideas about civilizing processes can shed light on questions of gender in the context of the fitness gym. Elias's ideas about foresight have been useful in understanding feminine identification at the gym. The aspects of foresight that have informed the analysis of the formation of femininities are the processes of psychologization, the process of rationalization, and feelings of shame and embarrassment. Elias's own description of the characteristics of court relationships is useful here in summarising the pressure for foresight that characterises the exercise relationships observed in the fitness gym. At court, he explains the "preconditions of social success" are "continuous reflection, foresight, and calculation, self-control, precise and articulate regulation of one's own affects, knowledge of the whole terrain, human and non-human, in which one acts" (Elias, 2000, p. 398). For women who work-out in the gym, social status is founded on the acquisition of a slender, muscularly toned body. The development of high status bodies requires precise regulation of one's own body, attunement of one's exercise

behaviour to that of others, and the acquisition of knowledge about exercise, fitness and dietary regimes.

6.10 Concluding Comments

The main aim of this chapter has been to examine how Elias's ideas about identity and identification can shed light on the production and reproduction of feminine identities in the fitness gym. Women who work-out embody an individual sense of feminine self (I), that is, at the same time, part of a group (We) image of femininity. These I/We images of femininity are constructed in terms of the exercise identities that some women develop in the context of the fitness gym, but also in terms of their wider, and more long-term exercise experiences.

Women experience exercise in various ways and different feminine identities are formed in the context of working-out. Female bodies are central in the construction and reconstruction of femininities in the fitness gym. For those who work-out, well-honed, athletic female bodies, as well as more conventional slender physiques, represent the ideals of femininity. To some extent, the formation of feminine identities in the fitness gym is founded on different female bodies. Simultaneously, the women I have spoken with share some common conceptions of feminine bodies that, in part, serve as the foundation for the formation of their gendered identities. But, a sense of femininity is not just founded upon common conceptualisations of gendered bodies and unique (different) characteristics and experiences of femininity. At the level of social habitus, some female exercisers share some feminine characteristics with some others in the fitness gym.

Significant in the production and reproduction of femininities in the gym, is the finding that women who work-out share a preference and emotional tie to particular exercise behaviours and female body ideals. More specifically, they share a disposition

towards cosmetic fitness activities, and a preference for slim and muscularly tight female physiques. These shared characteristics can be defined as a feminine body habitus. Not only do women in the gym share a disposition to exercise practices designed to sculpt feminine body ideals, all of their body management routines have a feminine specification. These women consider exercise, diet and cosmetic beauty regimes to be a normal, natural part of being feminine. Arguably, such dispositions represent a feminine body habitus that is white, middle-class, Western, heterosexual and able-bodied. Such dispositions have, in the long-term, become deeply ingrained in the women in question.

A feminine body habitus is not formed through women's involvement at the fitness gym alone. There is an historical character to the formation of habitus. Adolescent memories of the body, and experiences in physical activity, for example, have an effect on the formation of a feminine body habitus. Adolescent, appearance-based experiences of physical activity may be explained, in part, in terms of the role of physical education during adolescence. For some women, traditional competitive sports are associated with negative corporeal experiences. But this does not mean that such negative physical experiences are necessarily a deterrent to physical activity. Rather, corporeal experiences of being "fat", "chunky" or "bulky" can serve to develop some women's taste for exercise that might contribute to the construction of an appropriately feminine appearance. It is emphasised here that women's present concerns about their appearance, current preferences for particular exercise regimes, and enduring taste for cosmetic fitness activities, are rooted in earlier bodily experiences. Early corporeal experiences are linked to the organisation of physical activity for girls and the prevailing attitudes of parents, teachers and coaches to girls' involvement in sport and exercise.

Even earlier bodily experiences will have taken place in family and neighbourhood contexts.

Central to the production and reproduction of femininities are the shifting power relationships that have been observed and explained in Chapter 5. The monopolization of corporeal resources, for example, is connected to the development of an ideology that constructs an inferior, 'They' image of outsider bodies. As was shown in Chapter 5, derogatory terms for outsider bodies included 'fat', 'unfit', 'ugly' and 'bad'. Flattering descriptions of 'fit', 'slim' and 'beautiful' female physiques dominated the image of established bodies in the fitness gym. Established female exercisers experienced feelings of security and pride in the collective 'We' ideal of corporeal superiority. Feelings of distress and discomfort characterised the unfavourable, collective, 'They' image internalised into the way that outsiders viewed themselves. The dynamics of 'We' images of femininity, and their connection with individual 'I' images, then, are linked to the unequal and shifting power balances that characterise the relationships between exercisers.

It has been argued that the internalisation of idealised images of femininity, and feminine dispositions, takes place in the context of a struggle for status. Such an observation seems to illustrate some of the links between working out, civilized bodies, feminine identification, and the inculcation and perpetuation of a feminine body habitus. In the quest for superior physiques, civilized female bodies reflect the internalisation of higher degrees of self-restraint and the engagement in more firmly regulated exercise behaviour. Such corporeal self-discipline reflects a greater degree of foresight in relation to the body, exercise and dietary regimes.

Processes of psychologization, in part, characterise the status rivalries that exist between established and outsider women in the gym. There is evidence in this study

that the psychological body image that women have of themselves and others is developed through observation of others and experience of working-out in the fitness gym. It appears that women who work-out carefully manage their bodies by continually monitoring their own and others' appearance and exercise behaviour. Precise corporeal observations enable exercisers to learn the corporeal rules for achieving a higher status physique. In the context of the fitness gym, and for some women, the underpinning rationale for female body management is the desire for status that is a consequence of a superior body image.

A specific work-out rationality is evident in the gym whereby superior, high status physiques represent instruments of power. Women who work-out express 'rational' modes of thought about how working-out might develop a body worthy of the respect of others. A firmly regulated and disciplined approach to exercise and diet are necessary preconditions of success and prestige in the fitness gym. Female exercisers constantly attune their exercise behaviour, as well as other body management regimes, to that of others in the quest for feminine body ideals. For women who work-out, attunement of exercise behaviour towards the development of established feminine body ideals is part of the social reality at the gym and in their wider social life. On this basis, it can be said that feminine exercise identities and body habituses are produced in the context of a work-out rationality.

Using an Eliasian perspective on processes of rationalization in the fitness gym, it is argued that work-out rationality is characterised by modes of thought that are charged with emotion. The logic of working-out seems to be inseparable from the habitual feelings of shame and embarrassment that characterise the corporeal perceptions of some women at the fitness gym. Such feelings are a feature of the affect-charged nature of their feminine identification. Fear of social degradation (shame) is

linked to bodies that have the potential to be 'fat', 'ugly' or 'unfit'. Some women also felt embarrassed at other exercisers whose bodies could be described in such derogatory ways. The female respondents in this study illustrated that there are tensions between more affect-charged modes of thought and action, and more reality-congruent conduct in the fitness gym that impact on the development of their sense of femininity. Identity and habitus development are not solely rationally based. Rather, feelings of shame and embarrassment are significant in the construction and reconstruction of a feminine body habitus and feminine identities. The acquisition of a slim and muscularly toned female body elicits feelings of confidence, pride and increased esteem. On the other hand, transgression from a slender, tight female body is associated with feelings of shame and embarrassment that serve to threaten a woman's sense of femininity.

In conclusion, cosmetic fitness regimes, such as working-out, are significant in terms of the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities and habitus. Long-term involvement in the culture of fitness impacts on some women's preferences for particular types of exercise, shapes their attitudes towards the body and is fundamental to their sense of feminine self.

CONCLUSION

1. Introduction

The aim of this conclusion is to summarise the arguments developed throughout the thesis. The intention is to identify, and evaluate, the principal theoretical and methodological issues that have been explored. Furthermore, the purpose is to comment on the significance of the findings in terms of a contribution to existing knowledge about gender, the body, sport and exercise. Initially, in this conclusion, the objectives of the research are re-addressed, and consideration is given to the scope of the project. Next, the feminist-figurational approach is evaluated in terms of its potential for advancing an understanding about gender/body/sport relations. Summarising the methodological underpinnings of this project, the strengths and shortcomings of the research process, and research strategy, are presented.

The final sections outline the theoretical-empirical analysis of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. The ways that Elias's ideas about power, and feminist insights, might shed light on questions about gender, femininity, the body and exercise are outlined. Moreover, I make conclusions about how feminist and figurational ideas can be harnessed in terms of understanding the effects of interdependence, and gender/power relations, on what counts as a feminine physique in the fitness gym. Final consideration is given to the production, reproduction and inculcation of feminine identities and habituses in the unequal and fluctuating power balances between, and within, groups of female and male exercisers at the fitness gym.

2. (Re) addressing the Research Problem

In this thesis I have examined some of the ways in which bodies are fundamental to the production and reproduction of gendered social inequality, and the formation of gendered identities in the fitness gym environment. Focusing on the

social dynamics of a fitness gym in the South-East of England, the intention was to make sense of what seemed to be a female preoccupation with exercise regimes aimed at sculpting small, slender and tight physiques. The main area of concern, then, was the relationships between working-out, bodies and femininities. The three key questions guiding the research strategy were: (1) what patterns and relations of power underpin the production of feminine body ideals? (2) what are the relationships between power, bodies, and the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities in the fitness gym? and, (3) what is the potential usefulness of a preliminary synthesis between selected feminist and figural ideas for understanding gender, bodies and sport /exercise? Conclusions about the third research question will be addressed later. First, I wish to comment upon the ways in which questions 1 and 2 were examined.

3. Female Bodies, Fitness and the 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex'

Underpinning the research questions, process, and strategy was an intention to examine the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. Introduced in Figure 1, this complex maps out some of the major figural dynamics involved in the production and inculcation of feminine identities and behaviours in the fitness gym. It identifies a range of personnel, from several interdependent groups, that are active in negotiating, and mutually reinforcing, images of femininity in exercise and fitness contexts. The research involved participant observation and 'depth' interviewing as a means of investigating how exercisers at the gym understood and reacted to such images. I spoke, in more detail, about a range of corporeal issues, to a community of women who worked-out. The intention, here, was to further understand the meaning that some women attached to working-out, bodies and femininity. Also, I wished to understand how these women interpreted broader cultural images and messages associated with female fitness, health and beauty presented by personnel who form part of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. Such people include professionals in

the field of physical education, exercise, fitness and health, medical practitioners, dietary and nutritional specialists, and sport and exercise scientists.

The emphasis was on attempting to understand the gendered meanings underpinning the social dynamics of the fitness gym. The research methods used were ethnographic. This mainly involved participant observation and relatively informal interviewing. I watched and listened to exercisers at a fitness gym for a period of 18 months. I asked them questions and responded to their enquiries. I also collected information, from various sources, that might be useful in answering my research questions. And I compared evidence from my observations, interviews, documents and artefacts as I attempted to make sense of the process of working-out.

Issues surrounding female bodies, fitness and femininity emerged as one important feature of gender / body / work-out relations. I wished to explore, and understand further, the relationship between women who work-out, images of female bodies, and the culture of the fitness gym. For this purpose, longer, *relatively* formal interviews were conducted with a group of ten female exercisers. This involved between four and five interviews with each interviewee. Most of the interviews lasted approximately one hour. The rationale for this type of 'depth' interviewing was based upon a life-history approach. The aim was to capture a time perspective on these women's exercise behaviours so that I could better understand their choices and feelings towards female bodies and working-out.

Along with observational material, the small group of women more formally interviewed were able to shed light on the complexities of female body image, and the organisation and logic of gym culture. Yet, it should be noted that I have not listened to all of the women who worked-out at the fitness gym in question, or gyms in other cultural settings. There is some bias in this research project. It is a study of white, western, able-bodied, heterosexual middle class women, and it has been

conducted by a white, western, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual woman. It is not the case that women, and men, from a range of cultural, sexual and class backgrounds, and corporal (dis) abilities do not participate in exercise and fitness regimes. But, for example, the voices of black, Asian, Southeast Asian, working class, upper class, homosexual and disabled people are marginalised in this thesis. There was no intent to silence such voices. The purpose of selecting interview respondents using an informal snowballing technique was to enable potential interviewees to have some control over the decision to be involved, and hence, to establish a situation of trust between the women and me. All of the women who volunteered to be interviewed were white, western, middle-class, able-bodied and heterosexual and their profiles reflected that of the wider gym membership in this research setting. Notwithstanding such a bias, it is hoped that some sense has been made of the gendered character of the fitness gym by employing the principles of involvement and detachment, addressing the interplay between theory and evidence, and maintaining a reflexive approach to the status and adequacy of the knowledge produced.

One original aim that was not pursued in this research project involved an in-depth investigation of the long-term structured processes by which the contemporary fitness industry developed. Such an investigation would signify a further attempt to understand the relationships between personal exercise behaviour and the social organisation of the fitness industry as processes that are continually constructed in time and space. Smith-Maguire's (2001) analysis of the occupation of personal trainers in New York examines the production and consumption of contemporary fitness in the United States, and seems to offer some insights into the fitness industry of the United Kingdom. Two interviews were conducted with personnel from the London YMCA with a study of the developmental history of the fitness industry in mind. The YMCA (London) is one of the key organisations involved in the

development, provision, and professionalisation of exercise and fitness in the UK. Indeed, the personnel I spoke with had been instrumental in the development of exercise and fitness programmes and the education of exercise professionals over at least the past two decades. However, as the scale of such an investigation materialised it became clear that the plan was beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis. It is proposed, in conclusion, that tracing the developmental history of the fitness industry in the United Kingdom is fundamental to furthering an understanding of the contemporary obsession with working-out at fitness gyms, and is, thus, a theme for further research.

The research project remained focused on an ethnographic investigation of gendered bodies in the fitness gym. Prior to presenting an evaluation of the methods, and highlighting some of the methodological issues associated with this research, let me make some concluding remarks about the usefulness of a feminist-figural analysis for understanding gender / body / exercise relations in the context of the fitness gym.

4. A Feminist-Figural Analysis of Gender / Body / Sport Relations

Chapters 2 and 3 set out the theoretical basis of the feminist-figural approach advocated and utilised in this research. Notwithstanding the differences and tensions between some feminists and figural sociologists, it is argued that there *is* common ground between the perspectives. The central overlapping concern between some feminist accounts in the sociology of sport, and a figural analysis of gender and sport, is with understanding the dynamic and relational nature of gendered processes through time and space (Birrell, 1988; Dunning, 1999). By thinking in conjunction with feminist and figural perspectives, several themes and concepts have emerged in this thesis. Ideas about gender / power balances, established-outsider relations, I / We images of femininity and feminine habituses were introduced in Chapter 3 and have been useful for exploring the complexities of

female body image and femininity in the fitness gym in Chapters 5 and 6. Using a feminist-figurational approach it has been possible to understand why some female physiques are more highly valued than others. Furthermore, thinking in conjunction with feminist and figurational ideas has enabled me to make sense of the production and reproduction of feminine identities and habituses in the unequal and shifting (gender) power dynamics of the gym environment.

Two main points of contention between some feminists and figurational sociologists of sport are identified and examined in this thesis. The first concerns the way in which ideological commitments can cloud an understanding of gender relations within sports feminist research. The second involves a criticism of Elias's work for being gender blind and inadequate for advancing an understanding of sport and gender. With respect to a feminist-figurational perspective on gender relations in sport and exercise, several conclusions can be drawn from re-examining these two points of argument. Let me begin with the first issue.

In a discussion of the value-orientations of sociologists, the claim that some feminist accounts of sport tend to be more ideologically-based than knowledge-based is examined in Chapter 1 (Dunning, 1992, 1999). The dominance of ideological commitments in such work results in relatively inadequate understandings of gender / sport relations. It seems that feminists could more effectively utilise their claims to a reflexive, self-critical approach to address, what often seems to be, an unexamined feminist problematic. The type of reflexivity that characterises the identification of *some* methodological and theoretical shortcomings in feminist research could be expanded, in feminist-figurational accounts, to incorporate Elias's (1978, 1987) position on the relationship between knowledge and values. The feminist and masculinist assumptions of *both* feminist and figurational social researchers, and the societies they form, should be examined if more adequate, or 'reality congruent' knowledge about gender / sport relations is to be developed.

The task of producing relatively high degrees of adequate knowledge about gender, sport and exercise requires consideration of theoretical and methodological involvement and detachment. The next section will make some specific conclusions regarding the methodology of involvement and detachment. Here, I emphasise that gender / body / sport relations can be more adequately understood by embracing developmental thinking about gendered social processes, and examining the unequal relationships between, and within, groups of women and men in sport and sport-related contexts. Moreover, more reality-congruent feminist work will be marked by a level of involvement, tempered with an appropriate degree of detachment (Dunning, 1992). In coming to terms with the process of involvement and detachment in this research project, specific concepts such as the personal pronoun model, the interplay between theory and evidence and the adequacy of evidence have been useful. As I have argued in Chapter 5, my theoretical and methodological encounters in this research project have led me to conclude that feminist researchers could use their feminist involvements as a source of motivation and 'insider' knowledge, while, at the same time, striving to maximize a degree of theoretical, methodological, and practical detachment. In order to develop more adequate knowledge about gender relations, figurational sociologists should examine the masculinist and / or feminist assumptions in their research. The sport / gender problematic might be further understood by enquiring about females and males, and femininity and masculinity, in relational terms (Dunning & Maguire, 1996; Murphy et al., 2002; Waddington et al., 1998).

The second key difference between some feminist and figurational sociologists of sport surrounds the contention that Elias's work is gender blind and limited in its application to gender studies (Hargreaves, 1992, 1994). Recognising that too few figurational studies have *explicitly* addressed questions about a diversity of female sports experiences, sport as a site for the production, reproduction and

inculcation of feminine identities and habituses, or the relations between the sexes in sport and exercise, this thesis contends that Elias's approach *can be, and, has been,* used in sociological endeavours to answer questions about gender. Elias himself was interested in the relations between the males and females and wrote about the topic in terms of civilizing processes, European court culture, ancient Roman society and established-outsider relations. As is shown in Chapter 5, Elias's insights into the problematic of gender inequality, along with a figurational perspective on power ratios, can help to shed light on the shifting power dynamics between, and within, groups of women and men in sport and exercise settings. Furthermore, in Chapter 6, Elias's conceptualisations of power, identities, identification and social habitus have been useful in understanding the fitness gym as a site of the formation of feminine identities. In particular, the personal pronoun model and Elias's notion of social habitus have illustrated the centrality of the body, and gender / power ratios, in the production and reproduction of feminine identities.

The theoretical approach in this thesis incorporates insights from feminist and figurational sociology. Chapter 4 highlights that, methodologically, the research is also underpinned by insights from both perspectives. Next, I address the main methodological considerations that characterised this study of gendered bodies in the fitness gym.

5. Methodological Considerations

Chapter 4 illustrates that there are theoretical and methodological links between feminisms and figurational sociologies. Contra some critics, one can be a feminist and a figurational sociologist at the same time. Four key themes frame the feminist-figurational approach to this research. Each has influenced the research questions, the choice of method, and the interpretation of the evidence. The feminist-figurational themes of this research project are summarised below.

First, the research questions about female bodies and the fitness gym have arisen out of my own cultural identity as a white, western, middle-class, heterosexual able-bodied female involved in sport and exercise. The project is marked by my feminist sensibilities. *Second*, however, the research strategy is founded on a critical analysis of feminist standpoint research that fails to examine its feminist assumptions, and, thus, provides relatively inadequate understandings of gender relations. In terms of gender, feminist standpoint research tends to ignore important differences and similarities between and within groups of women, like the ones that have been found in terms of the formation of feminine identities in the fitness gym.

Third, the research strategy has been guided by the methodology of involvement and detachment as a means of producing reality-congruent knowledge about gender, feminine bodies, and the fitness gym. It has been argued that more adequate knowledge about female body ideals and femininity can be achieved via a balance between an 'involved' feminist position and a more detached view. Several ways of achieving an appropriate degree of detachment have been identified in this thesis and they include: a critical evaluation of the role of values in the research process; the investigation of the exact pattern of power relations between researcher and research subjects; the use of developmental thinking; and, consideration of the interplay between theory and evidence.

Fourth, and connected to the third set of issues, the ethnographic principles and practice of participant observation and interviewing are employed to understand how people make sense of working-out, and, specifically to investigate the gendered significance of female bodies, and the formation of feminine identities in the fitness gym. The conclusions that can be drawn from the theoretical-empirical case study of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex' are presented below.

6. The 'Exercise Body-Beautiful Complex': A Theoretical-Empirical Case Study

Suggesting and exploring the underpinning tenets of a feminist figurational approach, I have, to paraphrase Dunning (1999, p. 240), attempted to show via "theoretical-empirical" analysis how such a perspective is potentially useful in advancing knowledge about gender / body relations in the context of sport and exercise. There is a connection here between the advancement of theoretical knowledge about gender / body / sport relations, and practical action, in terms of resolving problems of gender inequality in the fitness gym. Let me explain.

One of the hallmarks of feminist research is a commitment to theoretically, and politically informed activity (Andermahr et al., 2000; Birrell, 2002; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002; Stanley, 1990). For feminists, it is not enough to simply understand unequal gender relations. Feminists are committed to changing gender inequality on the basis of theoretical knowledge gained. This type of feminist praxis dovetails with the underpinning objective of figurational sociology. For figurational sociologists the sociological endeavour involves "adding to the social fund of knowledge ...in the belief that greater understanding will enhance our capacity to exercise control in the increasingly important sport and leisure sphere" (Dunning, 1999, p. 240). Elias was concerned with explaining social problems, and, specifically with advancing knowledge that could provide practical solutions to those problems (Dunning 2002; Elias, 1978). The findings of this research have helped to understand the complexities of female body image, and the significance of the body in the production and reproduction of femininities in the fitness gym. Such findings have practical implications for the provision and practice of exercise regimes in the fitness gym. Some examples from the research will illustrate this point.

To some extent, working-out is a constraining regime, used by some women to change their bodies to narrowly defined images of female beauty. Popular images of slender, lean and tight female physiques are mediated through fashion

magazines, health and fitness publications, medical and dietary information, and sport and exercise science documents. In addition, such images are reinforced in the organisation and practices of the fitness gym. Yet, there is evidence in this thesis that female body ideals are not uni-dimensionally defined by thinness. Images of the female body-beautiful are more varied. Working-out, like other sporting activities, is a site for female (and male) empowerment and autonomy (Birrell, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Scraton & Flintoff, 2000; Theberge, 2002). In the fitness gym, what counts in terms of the female body-beautiful, is founded on the *relative* capacities of female and male exercisers to control corporeal ideals of femininity.

Fitness instructors, personal trainers, and some female and male exercisers have a relatively high degree of control over what counts as the female body-beautiful in the gym. And some of these more dominant personnel can, and do, compel some female clients to exercise as a means of achieving slim, tight body ideals. Established I/We images of female attractiveness and status are a part of some women's social reality in the fitness gym and wider culture. Such images are reinforced by several mechanisms including: the insecurity and emotion that surrounds the acquisition and maintenance of an ideal physique; the monopolization of corporeal power; the construction of group charisma and group disgrace; the formation of gossip networks; and, the corporeal logic of the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'. Yet, the personal exercise experiences of some women in this study indicated that preferred images of slimness, muscular tone and fitness could be challenged, negotiated and changed.

One example of the challenge to idealised female corporeality is connected to women who use weights to build muscle and develop muscular strength. Such women bend the corporeal rules of the gym. Weight training women have the potential to expand the limits of the female body-beautiful. Some instructors are involved in this type of expansion of what counts as feminine. In part through this

research, some instructors recognised that some women gained a sense of esteem, confidence, and physical and emotional strength by developing their muscles (Gilroy, 1989; McDermott, 1996, 2000). Such instructors incorporated the use of weights into their exercise prescriptions as a means of empowering female exercisers. To some extent, female exercisers and instructors who are able to take a corporeal detour via detachment, come to understand that idealised images of female bodies are not necessarily achievable or desirable. Some of these exercisers and fitness trainers, then, give different meanings to the female body-beautiful and, for them, working out is a pleasurable means of constructing a more self-defined body image. While these examples are somewhat individually based, they signal a potential wider intervention, through exercise, fitness and health practices to challenge narrow body cultures emerging from what has been referred to as the "sports-industrial complex" (Maguire, 2004, p. 299). Indeed, in the fitness gym in this study, the incorporation of exercise on prescription schemes (GP referrals), boxercise, female weight training, self-defence for women, and therapeutic activities such as yoga and pilates can, arguably, promote a diverse range of body cultures, identities and habituses.

Female bodies are central to the formation of feminine identities and habituses in the fitness gym. It has been shown that women who work-out embody a personal (I) image of femininity, that is, at the same time, part of a group (We) image of femininity. In part, different feminine identities are founded on different female bodies. For women who work-out, muscular, athletic female physiques, thin bodies, and a curvaceous appearance all represent ideals of femininity. There is also evidence that a sense of feminine identity is founded on shared characteristics of appearance and deportment. In terms of the women interviewed in this study, common conceptions of femininity particularly involved appearance related concerns. Feminine bodies were characteristically defined as shapely, slim, petite, and tight, with a smooth skin texture, and dressed and presented according to appropriate

feminine specifications. Clothing that 'showed off' curvaceous, firm breasts, a pert, round bottom, and a small 'nipped in' waist, for example, was particularly considered feminine. While femininities are built on both difference and sameness, at the level of social habitus, some female exercisers share some characteristics of femininity with other women, specifically in the context of the fitness gym.

The women in this study shared a preference for cosmetic fitness activities, and an emotional tie to aspirations for a slim, muscularly tight physique. Working-out was part of a repertoire of body management routines aimed at constructing a sense, and appearance of, femininity. For these women, exercise, dieting and cosmetic beauty regimes were a normal, natural part of being a woman. These shared characteristics define a feminine body habitus that is white, middle-class, western, heterosexual and able bodied. Such dispositions are not developed solely in the fitness gym. It has been shown in this thesis that adolescent memories of the body, and experiences in physical activity, have a long-term effect on the historical character of feminine habitus. For example, some women associate adolescence with negative corporeal experiences. But being, feeling, or labelled 'fat', or appearing physically inept at sport and games does not necessarily deter these women from physical activity. Rather, such corporeal experiences can influence the development of a taste for exercise that might contribute to the construction of a specific type of femininity. The findings of this research indicate that, for the women interviewed, present concerns about appearance and preferences for particular exercise regimes, and an enduring taste for cosmetic fitness activities, are rooted in earlier bodily experiences. Early corporeal experiences are connected to the organisation and practice of physical activity for girls and the prevailing attitudes of parents, teachers and coaches to girls' involvement in sport and exercise.

The formation of self-images of femininity, and We images of femininity, is connected to the unequal and shifting power balances between and within groups of

women and men in the fitness gym. The development of feminine identities and habituses takes place in the context of a struggle for status. The monopolization of corporeal resources is connected to the development of an ideology that constructs an inferior, unfavourable 'They' image in terms of 'fat', 'unfit' female bodies, and a superior, preferable 'We' image in relation to 'slim', 'fit' women. In the quest for superior physiques, some female bodies can be considered as more civilized bodies since they reflect the internalisation of higher degrees of self-restraint, and the employment of more firmly regulated exercise behaviour. Such female corporeal self-discipline reflects civilizing tendencies towards a greater degree of foresight in relation to bodies, exercise, and dieting. In other words, the evidence in this study reveals that women who work-out, carefully manage their bodies according to idealised images of femininity, and by perpetual surveillance of their own and others' bodies and exercise behaviours. The underpinning impetus for corporeal observation in the fitness gym is the desire for status, a consequence of a superior female body image developed as part of a specific exercise habitus.

This research has emphasised the developmental character of feminine identity and habitus formation. It has demonstrated that, for the women in this study at least, past corporeal experiences make a significant contribution to the production, reproduction and inculcation of feminine identities and female body habituses. Indeed, to make sense of these women's exercise behaviours and their perceptions of feminine body ideals, and to understand the influence of my own biography on the development of the research questions, and interpretation of the findings, it has been necessary to consider corporeal experiences over time. These women choose cosmetic fitness activities because they appeal to their, already internalised, views of female attractiveness that are founded on the acquisition and maintenance of a slender, tight physique. This does not mean that habitus is fixed and unchanging. Rather, the findings of this research indicate that an enduring preference for

cosmetic fitness activities, and the inculcation of particular modes of feminine conduct and corporeal tastes, has developed over time and in the context of specific socio-cultural conditions. The evidence indicates that sport and exercise practices have been particularly significant in the development of a female body habitus characterised by an emotional attachment to cosmetic fitness and a desire for the slim, muscularly toned ideals of female beauty and fitness. Furthermore, personnel from the wider 'exercise body-beautiful complex' have been influential in the negotiation and reinforcement of idealised images of femininity in exercise and fitness contexts.

There is a tendency for contemporary exercise and fitness regimes to develop somewhat narrow notions of feminine corporeality that are founded on commercialised ideals of external appearance and scientifically evaluated measures of internal fitness. Arguably the promotion of such narrow body cultures reflects the emergence and diffusion of a performance-efficiency model of human bodies more broadly (Maguire, 2004). However, there is some potential for exercise, fitness and health regimes to challenge, and broaden, corporeal ideals of femininity. Providing opportunities for, and incorporating, different women with different bodies and alternative conceptions of femininity to express themselves through exercise practices at fitness gyms is one important strategy for broadening idealised notions of the female body-beautiful. As previously noted, providing exercise practices such as weight training, boxercise, martial arts, and yoga can contribute to the promotion of diverse female body cultures, identities and habituses. Yet, it appears that a challenge to the marginalisation of alternative views of the female body-beautiful will take more than the provision of corporeal practices that are not simply founded on the construction of slim, tight female bodies, or the short-term involvement of individual women in such activities.

Personnel involved in the wider 'exercise body-beautiful complex' should be involved in raising awareness about the potential of working-out for embracing a diversity of female body cultures, identities and habituses. Exercise and fitness professionals, for example, can influence the practices of exercise participants with whom they have face-to-face contact. At the same time, exercise providers have access to media sources where they could make a difference about what counts as an acceptably feminine physique. Instructors and personal trainers could take up the challenge against the myth of female weakness by publicly celebrating and encouraging the development of muscular strength and power in women. Exercise professionals could help to foster a more inclusive culture of corporeality, in the fitness gym at least, by encouraging and incorporating rather than excluding those who are unfit, unhealthy and over-weight. In terms of a future research strategy, the struggle against narrowly defined ideals of female beauty will involve the advancement of knowledge about both the subjective experiences and motivations of participants, as well as the forces shaping the wider culture of the fitness industry that I have defined as the 'exercise body-beautiful complex'.

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APPENDIX 1
EDITED INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

INTERVIEWEE 002a – ‘BETH’
1 JULY 1998
INTRODUCTORY INTERVIEW
GENDER, BODIES, IDENTITIES IN THE FITNESS GYM

I invariably saw and talked to Beth whenever I was at the gym .She was a regular exerciser who agreed to be interviewed after we had been chatting about my research. She had been upset the past few times I had spoken with her and when she arrived for this interview she was clearly upset. She still wanted to take part even though I explained we could wait.

INTERVIEWER (LM) : [...] from what you've said to me before there are clearly a lot of difficult things going on in life at the moment. We could leave this interview if you like.

PARTICIPANT (B) : Mmmm. (She nods almost nervously). No I'd like to talk to you.

LM : But just start with saying something about how you feel about working-out at the moment

B : Um ... my self esteem isn't very high at the moment. Basically just because I split up with my boyfriend ... I mean, I can say to you I split up with Julian [She uses his name when she realises that she is talking to someone who knows her a little rather]. It makes you feel sort of depressed and because he, at the moment doesn't want me back I feel down and low and I think I've found recently that I always did things for other people. Like I always trained and always wanted to look good or whatever for other people and now it's just me on my own and it's just a strange feeling and it's just really sort of weird. I am starting to get my confidence back now. But I didn't have any confidence at all and I didn't want to go out and I didn't, well you know ? I wasn't bothered about myself at all

LM : In this respect then how significant is exercise to you at the moment ?

B : It's been weird exercise. When I first split up with him I really wanted to exercise a lot and then I get into this real depression stage and I didn't have any incentive to do anything. And now it's a bit of both really. It's like sometimes I want to exercise and sometimes I can't be bothered because to me I always ... even though you like to look good for yourself I always had a goal to either impress Julian, you know, I wanted him to be proud of me or other people to be proud of me and to look good .. I mean you know even sort of ... he would say 'oh you are looking really fit' and things like that. Um it's just strange. So I'm not, not as, motivated as in real body exercise at the moment as I have been.

LM : Just tell me a bit more about how you gone from wanting to exercise a lot when you first split up with Julian to how you feel now

B : Um ... I think when we first split up I was like right we are going to have a break and I'm going to prove to him ... and I'm going to get really really fit and really toned and he's really really going to like me cos I'm going to be really fit and everything. And it was kind of like OK shut off for a bit, go mad for a bit, try and lose a bit of weight and diet and then he'll fancy you again. And so I sort of went like that for 3 or 4 weeks, lost weight, got fit again and then it went to the stage where things were getting me down and then I changed and I was eating more and not exercising very much and I just lost incentive for everything > And then I think you lost it. I lost confidence in myself and I just given go to the gym as much cos I was getting upset at the gym.

LM : How low have you gone ?

B : I went pretty low. I had to go to hospital once. I overdosed on my depression tablets. It wasn't anything major, it was just like a cry for help that I wanted to get better. And I thought that by taking too many of those and alcohol I would get better. Um .. but luckily I mean, I think I new in myself that it wouldn't effect me that badly. Mum thought it would and she took me straight .. I mean I came back and told her that I'd done it and she took me straight to hospital. I just got very low. It was stages that I got low.

LM : Tell me a bit more about that event

B : I was actually, well I thought it was a time when I thought I was getting slightly better. And then I went to Wickhambreaux with my Dad and I'd had a bad day

thinking about Julian. So we went to Wickhambreaux and I was chatting with the locals and they were chatting about Julian and then we went to another pub where we used to know everyone but they had never spoken to me about it and that night they did and they sort of said Oh so you are officially split up. And it was just that and the combination of alcohol and I just got really low and I thought you know I just wanted to get better. That was the only time that I've ended up in hospital. I've had a lot worse times. I've had a few times when, well sometimes when I spoke to Julian on the phone late at night and we would get into an argument or he would say something horrible and I would get so upset and I would just lie in my bed and cry and cry. And I'd just start hurting myself cos I really hated myself for what I'd done .

LM : Hurting yourself in what way ?

B : Punching myself, kicking myself, hitting my head against the wall, just anything that would really hurt myself. More punching myself and bashing my head and pinching. Really wanting to hurt myself. And then Mum would come in and she wouldn't be able to do anything and she'd have to call my Dad I just really literally got myself into a real state and I couldn't get out of it. And I used to do it about, I suppose about once a week.

LM : How did you feel when you were doing it ?

B : I was, it was as though I was just in a sort of a ... I was just so low that I was just in this .. even psychological sort of thing. I was so depressed, so low, I hated myself and I just wanted to hurt myself. It was really as though I was a sort of a different person in a funny sort of way. I just wanted to get out and I hated everything that had happened and I wanted it all sorted out and I just couldn't do anything

LM : You said you wanted to punish yourself for what you'd done ?

B : Mmmm.. Yes

LM : But what had you done that was so wrong ?

B : Well I'd got involved with someone else you know, when I was on holiday. I'd never done anything like that before in my life. Sort of getting involved with someone. It confused me when I was out there. And I think it was worse cos he really liked me. I just thought shit it's happened OK it's happened but I'll come back home and it would be all right. I made up my mind that that would happen. I was a bit confused when I got back. And then this guy phoned me. I wrote to him and told him about

Julian . And I suppose I did have some feelings for him. I don't know what it was. There was obviously something there, it wasn't just a real sort of fling and Umm ... then he phoned me and said I'm coming to England. Even thought he was upset that I'd told him I'd got a boyfriend. And I said...you know I don't know what to do. And I panicked that night and I cam off the phone in tears and I said t Mum what am I going to do and Made up my mind I had to tell Julian. And I told him and he was very upset, very very upset. But he turned round and said look it's happened where do you see your future. And I don't know why but I couldn't tell him that 'it's with you'. I think because I knew this guy was coming to England and I just wanted to get that bit over and done with, perhaps see him, I didn't know what I wanted. Just to sort myself out. So I didn't say 'I see it with you' and he's always held that against me. He really has

LM : How did having another relationship with this guy make you feel ?

B : I felt really good at the time

LM : How did it make you feel at the time ?

B : I felt really good at the time. Yeah I felt confident, very. I suppose because I went out there and someone was attracted to me and someone enjoyed my company and we got on well. I think Julian and I you know, we'd put so much into the house, we hadn't taken time in our appearance together or doing different things and it was just that. And some really liked me and I hadn't had that for such a long time. I mean I always knew Julian really liked me and really doted on me but it was just a different sort of thing.

LM : We talked about punishing yourself / Had exercise ever been a form of punishment ?

B : Not so much really no. It's been more .. well I haven't gone mad mad mad with that. I haven't gone out for a real slogging run or killing myself like that.

LM : Why ?

B : I don't know. I got into this thing that I wanted to hurt myself physically and I couldn't do it as exercise. I saw exercise as making me look good. So it's not a form of punishment even though it hurts sometimes

LM : Have sport and exercise always been positive for you ?

B : Yeah. I would say so. There's never been, well I mean that have been times when I've had pressure and there is a negative side but

LM Tell me a bit more about that

B : Oh when I was younger my Dad was very much wanting me to get into the England squad for hockey and there was just, it was the mental pressure rather than the physical pressure. My body could always cope with it. I never exerted myself so I was actually killing myself. But it was the mental pressure and stress from that He was really upset cos I gave it up and didn't get in. It was that sort of pressure really

LM : Did that take the enjoyment out of the sport for you ?

B : It did towards the end with the hockey. Yeah and I think I lost the competitiveness a bit because when I was at school I did so much. I was doing sport every day. every weekend was sports orientated

LM : Just hockey ?

B : No..Urm.. it was for a stage. Then it was hockey and basketball. then at one stage I was trying to do hockey, basketball and netball together. You just couldn't do it. Then there was the pressure of what are you going to do. Mum wanted me t do netball, dad wanted me t do hockey cos it was more considered to be the female dominated sport. And I think also I had pressure at Canterbury Hockey Club when I was there . But I didn't' really fit in ?

LM : Why not ?

B : I don't know. I think cos they were all sort of big butch women and at the time I was really quite skinny. I mean a lot skinnier than I am now. It was like ... say I went to different functions ... it was almost like 'oh there's *her*'. I just didn't fit in as I was growing up. I just didn't feel...well every season I went I was like a stranger again.

LM : You looked different to the other women ?

B : Yeah, to most of them.

LM : How were you different ?

B : I suppose I was slimmer than them. And the way that I dressed. I took care of myself. I mean some of them tried but they were just big butch women really and I think I was just .. I mean there were some very fit women there even though they

were big. But a lot of them were big and I think well it must have been when I was about 16 or 17 and I was getting noticed at parties and the girls didn't like it or the women didn't like it.

LM : When did you stop playing sport at that level ?

B : Probably about ... I suppose when I was 17

LM : What did you do then ?

B : Well I just .. I suppose at 16 or 17, I still carried on at school but I stopped outside sports clubs. And then I started going into aerobics and different things. I was going swimming twice , 3 times a week and I was going to aerobics 3 times, 4 times a week and I was going out running. I was always running, whatever, so I went into ore the fitness side rather than the sports side

LM : How did you feel about this change ?

B : At the time probably it was better. I think I needed a break. I miss it now and I think I've got out of the competitive, determination type thing. Now it's just sort of go for yourself or go for you fitness.

LM : Would you go back to sport ?

B : I did a bit at College but not much. It was just sort of Wednesday matches and some evening basketball as well. So I did a bit but I never had that real determination that I had at school

LM : What did you get out of it at College ?

B : That I kept my sport going I think. I really wanted to. I mean I look at myself now and I might never play .. if I don't get back into hockey now, I might never play again in my life. It's a strange feeling. you do you sport so well up to a certain standard and then everything else takes over your life. And you get out of something. I know if I ever went back to hockey I wouldn't be in the first team. I'd be in the 3rd team or something.

LM : How would that make you feel ?

B : I'd find it difficult at first. It would probably be hard cos I'd probably be with the 14 year olds like I was. I'd probably feel like those ladies when I was playing !

LM : How important was the basketball that we played together at college ?

B : It was important. I never had that real gutsy determination that I used to have. Really really dedicated. When I was younger, we were going to win and that was it. But when I got out of that frame of mind and other things came in, there was never, well I always went for it but I think I lost confidence in myself as well. I wasn't as good so I wasn't so competitive.

LM : Why do it ?

B : One to keep the sport going, one purely for the exercise. I know it's a brilliant for of exercise. you know it burns loads of calories. It does. I suppose that was one of the main reasons. I thought right I've played basketball. That'll be my exercise for the evening.

LM : Did you enjoy it ?

B : Yeah I did. I never hated it. I did enjoy it

LM : How important were the people that played

B : Oh definitely very important. Cos I think that's why I gave up the hockey and why I gave up College hockey cos I didn't enjoy it. Cos the ladies hockey team were bitchy. And it was the same at Canterbury. I just didn't seem to mix. And it wasn't me. There was me and another girl at College and we were just normal sort of people and the rest of them .. I suppose you'd call them real sport billies but they all drunk together and all they wanted to do was get absolutely drunk after the game. Lots of them were leBians. I mean that doesn't matter to me but it was silly things like ... the game was all right but then if there was blokes watching or the coaches or boyfriends or boys were involved they were always putting me forward to do things ... Oh Sally will do that ... or let's get Sally to ... they knew I was happy with my boyfriend and I wasn't interested but I me and this other girl were more of the girly girls. When we got back from the match and we were going out we wanted to dress up and not go in our tracksuits. And that put me off hockey

LM : Do you feel you are different from other sports women ?

B : Mmmm... a bit. Yeah I think I wasn't into all the College pub side and I needed a change. And I started working at the gym and that's when I started training there and it was new faces and just something different. I'd done sport so much in my life.

LM : Perhaps you don't have a routine at the gym at the moment but what is your commitment to exercise ?

B : Well my basic commitment to the gym used to be 4 times .. well if you look at a year ago 4 times a week. But really on a regular basis it was 4 or 5 times a week. And then I'd try and do a run as well. So I tried to train 5 or 6 times a week. Now at the moment I probably go to the gym 3 times a week and go for a run as well so it's not as much at the moment. And I'm trying to play golf at the moment so it's trying to fit it all in.

LM : I'll come back to the golf. But when you train what would be your routine ?

B : I like to do 45 minutes cardiovascular. Cos it burns the most calories (she laughs as she says this and we exchange a knowing glance). I'm not interested in .. I like to be toned but I'm not interested in getting big and bulky .. I just want to run and burn it off really and I know that if I go then I'm just going to burn it off and hopefully it will keep me leaner really. So I like to do 25-30 min. run then bike or stepper or something. It depends. If it's a nice day I will go out for a run and run further than I do on the treadmill. I'll run for a longer time but probably not as fast. And then it's lots of sit ups and then a little bit of light toning work.

LM : Do you have an ideal look ?

B : Yeah [she hesitates] ... I mean I'm not happy with myself at the moment I always want to be about 8.5 stones

LM : And how much do you weigh now ?

B : Nine. And that's my goal [8.5]. And when I was younger and I was very very skinny and I was going through my near on anorexic stage I suppose, I was 7 stone 4 lbs. I know I was too skinny then. But I know if I am about 8.5 stone then I won't have any flesh on me.

LM : Is there anyone who you could say has your ideal ?

B : No, it's individual to me. No, No. I mean I do look at girls a lot and I think God they are skinny. I mean I used to point... I mean I would be looking at girls more than Julian would be. And I used to point people out and say, Oh they are fit or whatever. And you know sometimes trim girls come in and I do find myself looking at them. I mean when I look at Mel sometimes, she is ever so... I mean she's got lovely definition, she's hardly got any ... her upper body I really like and her legs I think

sometimes aren't as good. You look at people sometimes and think yes, I'd like to be as lean as that or something.

LM : And um ... I've forgotten what I was going to say (we laugh). Oh yes, you mentioned being very thin when you were younger. Tell me about that ?

B : Well, when I was younger, my sister and I were naturally both big children. I was 5ft. 7 when I was 11 and I was just a big solid child. We always did sport. I started gymnastics when I was 3. We did swimming and everything. And my coach at gym . well we were just really too big and we did it up to county standard and he used to look at our diet. And he used to think we used to eat a lot. But we didn't. We were never fat. I remember my PE teacher when I was 11 said to my parents that they had never seen any child looking so strong at 11 years old. Cos I was just big, solid and muscular. But I'd always wanted to be skinny. I'd been through gymnastics and I'd never been able to do it. And um then I got to about 13 and I thought right I'm going to diet and it was the first time I'd ever dieted. And I cut down at the time to ... I think because I'd started to eat a little bit badly... I cut down to an apple for breakfast, a roll at lunch and then an evening meal. And I lost about 3/4 of a stone. Cos I think I'd got up to about 10 stone. Then I went into hospital and I lost another stone.

LM : What was that for ?

B : Appendix. I had my appendix out and it went wrong and I had peritonitis and I was in hospital for about 3 weeks and I didn't eat and I lost about a stone and a half. At my lowest I went down to 7 stone 4. I came out and yes people said I looked awful and I suppose for a little bit cos my muscles in my legs had sort of wasted away I was skinny and really grey. But when the colour started to come back and I put on a little bit of weight I then started to like it and I thought yeah I like this.

LM : Why did you like it ?

B : I'd never been skinny before and I was thin and I'd go into the changing rooms and people would say God you are ever so lucky you know you are really slim. And I felt really good. And my legs were probably like a normal person's legs cos I've always had big legs. But they were wonderful to me. I really liked them and I just liked being skinny. And also my boyfriend which was Phil at the time (we had just met Phil leaving Sally's house - he is the family accountant). He just loved skinny women and he always went on about skinny people. He loved it. He liked that. And that put a lot of pressure on me and once I went up to 8 stone and he turned round and said - 'you're fat'.

LM : How did that make you feel ?

B : Awful. I mean I just lost it straight away. I just starved myself. Also, ...when I.. so I wanted to keep my weight down. So I then just started eating an apple in the morning, an apple at lunch time and a salad in the evening. I mean this sort of went on for a period of about 2 years. I mean the real real cutting it down. And then .. I sort of stayed just under 8 stone, 7 stone 10. And I mean I kept my sport going. And I used to run and I used to do exercise every lunch time at school. After school I used to do at least 2 hours. So I was doing 3 hours a day exercise And then I started putting on weight. And I didn't eat any more. I was just having like a few apples or an apple and nothing. And NO fat at all. And I was putting on weight and I started to get worried about this. So I went to the doctor and he did a few tests. And he said obviously you are still under weight but he found out that my hormone umm...cortisone was too high and he said I think we are on to something here because body builders take it to put on weight and he said he would get me in touch with a hormone specialist. Um.. in the end I went to the hormone specialist and he took one look at me and said you are under weight, it's your perception of your self, there is nothing going on, basically come back when you are over weight and then we will do something about it. So I was always fighting this battle with my metabolism. Cos actually, I'm not born to be skinny. My sister, she is big. Naturally we can't eat loads and loads and loads. So basically I just exercised and exercise. I suppose then I had an appointment to see a dietician at the Chaucer hospital and they put me on a weight reducing diet and I put in 5 lbs in a week. It was just like .. and she said that if I wanted to sort my metabolism out then I had to put on about 2 stone. And I just said I'm not doing that.

LM : How did that make you feel

B : I just said I'm not doing it. Because I could never imagine doing it. I never ever want to get big.

LM : If you put n 2 stone now how would you feel ?

B : Awful. yeah I'd feel awful

LM : Does it frighten you

B : YEAH I

LM : Why ?

B : I don't know. It's just the way that I would look. Just round and would just lose all confidence if I had any in myself. But saying that I mean at one stage I think when I split up with Phil, I was about 19, by then gradually my weight had gone up to about 8 stone 5 and he used to call me fat then. And then I had a bit of time on my own and I stayed the same weight and then I started seeing someone at College. And it sort of went up then. And at College I was happy and I got into the drinking and everything else and I had a new boyfriend and I PUT IT ON ! And I went up to ... at the end of my first year .. up to 10 stone again .. about 10 stone 3 I think and I look at photos now and I think ... I was with Julian at the time and we had just started seeing each other and I can't believe it !! And I suppose I knew that I was big and I was upset that I was big and so I would eat. it was just one of those cycles and it just gradually went on. So then I just literally... that's the only way I lost weight is to starve myself. And it came off. But that's the cycle you see. That's the way it was going.

LM : DO you ever wish that you could get out of the cycle ?

B : Mmm... that's why when I went to the hormone specialist. I'm not asking to be skinny, I'm asking to lose weight. But what I'm asking to do is to be able to have breakfast, lunch and dinner. You know my calorific intake I'm supposed to be eating is 2000 and I am eating about 700 calories. I want to be able to you know if my friends are saying let's go out for meal, I don't want to feel guilty about it. I want to be able, you know if someone says have a packet of crisps JUST DO IT ! You know, or if you are invited to lunch, not feel guilty or not have to go out for a run. it's not as though I'm wanting to be really really skinny, it's just that fact. And I think when I started seeing Julian I thought well everyone has said she's really boring cos she doesn't eat and things like that. And we went on holiday together and I said to myself right these two weeks I'm going to eat. And you know we had something at lunch time and something in the evening and you know I put on half a stone because my metabolism is so mucked up. And that is the way that it goes.

LM : Are you out of the cycle now ?

B : I don't know. I am going through a bit of a funny phase. When I split with Julian, I lost half a stone very very quickly just because I didn't want to eat at all. Then I started eating a bit more and it went on a bit and then really I suppose the last couple of months I (she emphasises) would say I'm eating more than I used to and I'm coming home and having my tea. It's always quite low calorie but you know I have been having the odd packet of crisps. And like last night I was round my friends

and we had a curry. And sometimes if I'm really hungry before I go to the gym, I'll have a sandwich. I don't have any lunch. I have to now have an apple for breakfast cos I'm on my tablets. And the weight at the moment isn't going on. I don't know if it's stress or the tablets and Sometimes I think it might be the tablets which has altered my metabolism.

LM : What are the tablets ?

B ; Well I'm on two. One are antibiotics which are for my spots which are called Mynosis which I started about 3 months ago. Then I'm on something called Effexor which are the new form of Prozac and I've been in those Um.. 2 months now

LM : How do they make you feel ?

B : I really don't know. I can't tell. Normally they make me feel a bit better. But I don't know if I'm just coming more to terms with it. I still get upset but not as much. For 2 months, 2 and a half months there wasn't a day when I didn't cry. Whereas now about 3 or 4 times a week I'll cry but it's not consistent. I mean I was in a real state. I was crying at school. I mean everything. I was just gone. Whereas it's not as bad now But I have had bad turns especially when I mix them with alcohol. The doctor said I could mix them with alcohol but I'm actually going back to him tomorrow to say look .. cos it's new .. I want to tell him the side effects. And last Saturday, no the Saturday before that, I went out and had 3 glasses of wine and a bottle of Pils and I'd had a bad night talking to .. it was the first time I'd talked to Julian for about 5 weeks and I went out with Mum and I .. it was just one of those nights where you see people and they were talking about Julian and I just got myself in a hell of a state. And there was party over at Wickhambreaux and I wanted to be there and I got home and apparently I'd got really upset in the pub and I was crying and um.. I told Mum to go home and she walked home and I tried phoning Julian from the phone box outside and he wasn't in and I phoned the pub and he wasn't there and I got home and I phoned for a taxi and I said right I'm going over there and Mum picked up the phone and said 'You are NOT!) and she cancelled the taxi and I went mad. And I ran down the road and hid for about 20 minutes and then I came back and I don't know, I can't remember it at all. I can remember that bit and I remember getting upset but apparently I just went mad and I was punching and kicking. I mean I had bruises. I had bruises all the way down here (she shows me where on her hand and forearm). I

was completely really violent to my Mum and she had to phone my Dad and I can't really remember it.

LM : At what point did you start on the anti-depressants Sal ?

B : Urm.. I had... it was after about 2 and a half months and I just wanted to get better and I was still getting really really low and I think I thought I needed to see a counsellor or something to talk about it and I phoned ... and I'd had a bad weekend .. a Bank Holiday weekend and I'd had all weekend on my own. And I'd really got myself in a state. And I Phoned him up (Julian) on the Monday night and I said would you come and see a counsellor with me and he was like No !! And just talking to him and different things came up and we went over the same things again and all this trouble about hurting him and you know everything else and I just got myself in a real state and that was probably the worst turn I had had. And umm... I ended up phoning him in such a state at about half past two and I just really just wanted to curl up in a ball and everything just to go away. He was asleep but the message was on the answer phone. And I think he realised how bad I was and he phoned me up the next day. And he phoned my Dad and said look we've got to do something and Mum that night went to the doctor's about me. And Julian said look he said ... I said look can I see you and he said yes come round. And I went round and he cooked me a meal and he was just so nice to me ... and and he hugged me he said you've just got to get better and umm .. (she swallows and pauses and this is obviously upsetting for her but she starts to carry on) and I spent all night with him .. and (her eyes fill with tears) .. (she manages with difficulty to say) it was just so nice (here her voice falters and she begins to cry).

LM : It's OK - we can stop here. Are you all right talking about this ? I put what I think is a reassuring hand on hers. She doesn't respond but feels tense. She is curled in the chair and hugs her knees tightly. Her hands are clenched around her

B : She nods and wipes her tears

LM : Are you really sure ?

B : Yes .. (she continues through her tears but with difficulty - her voice falters). He said you've just got to get better. And I just thought well I just don't know. The only way I think I can get better is to get back with you. And I just thought perhaps these tablets will help. People were saying Oh .. I mean my doctor in the first place .. I said I DON'T want to take any tablets. I DON'T want to.

LM : Why ?

B : Just cos I just heard they do harm to people and it was a real sort of failure thing. But like now, my tablets run out on Friday and I don't know if I should go back cos I don't know if they are helping me or not. They are making me a bit better but my mind hasn't changed. They haven't changed my focus.

LM : Have they changed how you actually feel ?

B : I don't know. I get on with my life better now. But I still feel low, I still feel depressed. Not as depressed as I was. I'll try harder with people whereas I used to walk around and cry all the time. So in that respect I've got a bit of bubbiness back. Um.. but I don't know if it's that that's helped I just don't know how you can tell really

LM : Having said that you didn't want tablets what other advice did the doctor give ?

B : He offered me..he wanted me to have the counselling

LM : What about exercise

B : No not really. he knows that I do a lot of exercise cos he has always been involved with me for different things. And he did ask what I was doing in my free time cos I was stopping doing anything. Cutting everything out. I mean in the Easter holidays I sued to just lie on my bed. I had no incentive, no goal

LM : What about the counselling ?

B : Well I went once to a private one and he literally just talked about everything that had happened and I got myself in a state and he realised that .. at the end of it .. he said 'I realise that I know your Mum so I can't see you but I want to put you on to someone else'. And that took sort of two weeks and then this guy this psychotherapist phoned up and said you know I've been referred to you and the thought of having to go through it all again, tell him the story cos that's what really gets me down cos you know I hate everything that has happened ... I just blanked it and said no you know look I'm going to be all right and I didn't go to it. And then the NHS one came through cos I know I'd been put on the waiting list for that .. and that came through and I thought all right I will go. and I had to go through it all again, getting up set you know. And then the last few times I've been, we've kind of talked about how my life has been. You know competitiveness .. he's very into this competitiveness through sport.. and the stress that I've had in my life and the stress

that I had with Mum and Julian cos Julian didn't really get on with Mum and Mum didn't really get on with Julian and I didn't really fully move in with Julian cos of Mum and it was like a push pull scenario for quite a long time. You know he said to me we just have to build up your self esteem cos obviously your whole life has been built around making people happy. And when my Dad left my Mum I was the only one left to look after her and just different things and it was it was really difficult and he said that's what we've got to do that. And that was a week, two weeks ago. And he said look we haven't got any more session booked in and now it's up to you because I'm not going to make any decisions for you because you always have decisions made for you ... I you know you have to book up. Now it's weird, I don't know what to do really. I know I'm not better. I know I'm not better. I'm just not like I was.

LM : What has been the impact of other people on your life at this time ? You know, I was thinking of your Mum or ..

B : Well there's .. yeah ..me and Mum had a lot of tension cos I blamed her as well cos she was on holiday with me and she didn't stop it or say you know look stop it. She never really got on that well with Julian and you know it was that umm...My other best friends Sue and Andrea were always like are .you sure you are happy with Julian ? And I was always yes yes (she emphasises) you know and nothing at all. And they were always the ones saying this is the biggest decision of you life. And I was so happy, it was just what I wanted. And when I came back from holiday and it had happened. I told Sue and umm.. we talked about it quite a lot and she had sort of been through the same thing before and she had realised that obviously her boyfriend wasn't the right thing for her. It sort of made me think and I just panicked and she said yes you've got to make a decision, if things are right for you and Julian and you are happy it will work out. And I don't think I realised just how much I really loved him. He had always been so doting on me and I just think I thought it was all going to be easy. I would have a couple of weeks off, get my mind straight. It was an awful thing to do. And then I ... she was sort of there when I told him ... or there when I made up my mind but then when I told him she just disappeared. And she's got this new friend in Ashford and she rented a house with her and she just disappeared. And she got herself a new boyfriend. She's only ever been able to have one friend Sue. We've been friends since we were three and on and off we've been best friends but then when someone else has come along she's gone off and good old Sal has been back here for when she comes back. And it has been like that. And um... when she split up with her boyfriend after 7 years I was with Julian and I was

happy with that and this other friend of hers who she had just met at work had just split up with her huBand and it was as though they sort of went together and they just became such good friends and I was sort of ... Initially she'd still see me on Friday nights, then that dropped off and it was like she was making excuses all the time about why she couldn't see me. And I got upset about it.

LM : How did you feel ?

B : Yeah I did, I did get upset about it but luckily I had Julian and I suppose that I just thought well OK you know obviously you really do see who your friends are. And he was my best friend. You know my real soul mate. And um.. Andrea who ..we were really good friends at school and then she went away to university for 3 years and then she came back last year .. she's been ever so good since the Julian business. I mean I didn't tell her til after... well after I'd told Julian . and I sort of told her all about it and she was really there, really supportive. She got annoyed with me at times, really frustrated that I was still so upset. She got annoyed that Julian wouldn't have me back. She spoke to him in the phone you know and then she just had enough of it cos I was so low all the time and I was pulling her down as well. And she was really good. I mean she's gone to Australia now, she went last week. And that really really got me down cos it was as though I'd like lost my best 3 friends within the space of months. But it is actually quite difficult at the moment cos Sue, well the girl she lived with, they had an argument and the friend has moved out and of course she wants Sal back. And she is on the phone 3 times a week and it's really hard for me cos I could do with her cos I haven't got any close friends around me at all now. But then there is part of me saying well she doesn't really deserve it cos she has done it so many times. I know she'd love me to move in with her and yeah I was looking at moving out. I was thinking when I first split with Julian, right I'll get myself a place Cos he said 'Oh you are still a kid, you can't cope with it all'. And I just wanted to prove to him that no I'm not and I would do everything in the world to be with him (Sally's voice wavers and her eyes fill with tears - she tries to hide it with a little giggle) - I'm just saving a the moment.

LM : We have talked about so much but let's leave it there. But the last thing I wanted to ask you was about taking the tablets. Does it make you feel unhealthy ?

B : I've never been one for tablets. But I realise .. well when I went to pick up this prescription it was the first one I'd ever paid for ... so I mean I hadn't taken ... cos the pill I get free and other than that I'd just never ever had antibiotics or anything like

that it feels as though I am putting chemicals inside my body yeah. But I suppose that's why I didn't want them in the first place. I've never really been into the natural side. I've just thought that my body would cope whatever. And people have said to me that I need to take all these supplements cos I wasn't eating enough and I did used to when I was really skinny but I don't do anything now. And um .. it's a strange feeling. I suppose now I just pop them and get into a routine of it. I don't know what I'm doing to my body. I wish I did.

LM : Have you noticed any bad effects ? What about your periods ?

B : Not .. I haven't noticed anything like that. Um.. I don' t really know cos I'm on other antibiotics for my spots which my sister persuaded me to go on but they were getting bad and I think it was all just stress, yeah. But um no I don't know

We paused here whilst the tape was turned over I

LM : Do you ever worry about the health effects of exercise and diet ?

B : On You body ?

LM : Yeah

B : Um.. well I've always wanted to have like a whole body scan. I'd love to be able to see what my insides were like. Cos everyone says oh you know. And when I thought about what I was running on. I was running on 400 calories a day and doing 2 hours of sport. And I've always wondered what it was doing to myself And I've had problems with my teeth and with my nails

LM : What sort of problems

B : Well the enamel isn't particularly good on my teeth and I've got about six fillings and considering I don't eat sweets. And he asked me if I'd ever been bulimic which I'd never been and he put it down to diet coke as well. Cos I used to drink a lot of that to supplement the food

LM : Why diet coke ?

B : I suppose that it's half sweet and it filled me up. I never drank a lot of water. And I did I drank a lot of diet cake when I was at school and college. I have wondered what effect this has on my body. It's never shown any effect now. I seem to be fine. Yeah there are days when you feel rough. And I know when I've hardly eaten anything and I've gone to the gym and trained and you feel it. You get your dizzy spells or whatever. I did once have a well woman thing at the Chaucer hospital. But that didn't really tell me anything

LM : What did they do ?

B : Well not much ... weight, blood pressure, height, they gave me a smear. I thought it would give me a scan and different things like that but it wasn't much and we just chatted really. They measure my heart and my pulse rate. But I knew most of it. I wanted more of a full body scan to see if my insides were whittling away or what my bones were like

LM : Have your periods ever stopped ?

B : Yeah I didn't have them for four years. Um .. that was from 14 -18. Since that .. say four years.. I was on the pill at 16 so I definitely didn't have them for 2 years then

I went on the pill and I came off the pill when I was 18 cos they wanted to see if I'd get them back. And I didn't

LM : So you didn't have them when you were on the pill ?

B : No .. Oh yeah I mean I always had a false one. I've always had them with the pill but only ever for 2 days and that's it and ever so light. Literally the slender tampon I won't even fill 2 of those. So nothing at all

LM : What do you think about that ?

B : Well I've been to um .. I suppose it was like a gynaecologist and he did some tests on me and he said you are all right inside. This was when I was about 26 cos I was worried I wouldn't be able to have kids and he said you may .. if you stay skinny .. have to take a fertility pill but as regards the production of eggs and things like that I was OK. Cos I was worried about it and I've just been on the pill ever since and so I don't really know. I know they are still very light but touch wood (she touches the table and I touch my head !!) everything will be all right

LM : How do you feel about talking to me today ?

B : All right. Mmmm.

LM : Were you nervous ?

B : It was weird when we started with the tape I thought .. I thought I had to explain myself you know ... I had to explain my boyfriend

LM : But remember it's all confidential ?

B : Yeah but you think that in the transcript I should be explaining who everyone is

LM : Well I can send to the transcript to read and you can comment on it. I hope that you'll speak to me again

B : Oh yeah, fine.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE 002a – 'BETH'
1 JULY 1998

PERSONAL REFLECTION

This was another interesting interview. I am pleased that the participant and I seemed to develop an openness, confidence and rapport throughout the interview. Yet it was a difficult session given that the participant was obviously very upset at one point and broke into tears. I immediately touched her hand. This seems to always be my first reaction in personal, upsetting situations although I did wonder how appropriate it was in an interview situation. It struck me that what I had, at first thought, would be 'formal' interviews, were actually unstructured, ethnographic interviews with people that I had become 'involved' with. I would constantly be having to take a step back from this involvement to keep the research in mind. Anyway, I felt upset myself and was a little lost for fluid conversation, hence the need to use a reassuring hand. It seemed totally inappropriate to say anything really. I felt she needed a moment of silence just to gather herself. She didn't need pushing on any matter at this point. I removed my hand from hers quite quickly. She hadn't responded by holding it back, or moving in any way. Thus, I think the gesture was taken as intended, one of reassurance. Indeed she felt tense and tight. She was gripping her legs very tightly with her hands. Of course, I asked her if she wanted to continue. I asked twice if she was sure. She was adamant that she was OK. On reflection maybe I should have decided to terminate the interview. But her emotions didn't disturb me or make me feel anything negative other than empathy. I wondered whether many of these interviews would be quite emotional. I mean if I really am striking up a rapport with these women, and they are being honest with me then they will be emotional about sensitive issues. This was how Beth was *feeling*. And that was what I wanted to 'get at'. She was being open, honest and reflexive in her answers and this was evident in her uncontrollable emotion.

I know that I do not want to be in a position where she asks for my advice other than as a friend. She is under professional medical supervision and clearly this is not a role I would want to play or even get involved in. It was important for me to seek advice from my supervisor with regard to ethical considerations. We discussed at length the possibility of her 'needing' me in a greater capacity than I was able to or wanted to give. My response was that I really felt that I could balance my

involvement and detachment with this participant by being as open and honest with her as she had been with me. I did not consider her to be so unstable that she would be irrational. Yet I don't know where this situation will lead to. I agreed with my supervisor that he would discuss this methodological situation the Director of Research. Nevertheless, our relationship seems to be positive at the moment and both she and I are happy to continue.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE 002b – 'BETH'
20 OCTOBER 1998

After the difficulties Beth had been having she decided to go on holiday. We met just after she returned to talk about working-out at the fitness gym. This interview highlighted issues surrounding female body image, femininity, diet and exercise.

INTERVIEWER (LM): So you still look really brown from your holiday. How was it?

PARTICIPANT (B) : Yeah it has come off. But it was all right. Had a nice time. It was nice. It was quiet. A quiet holiday. There wasn't a lot to do there. We got a bit fed up of sunbathing after a week. So we went to the tourist rep and said what can we do we want to take some mopeds out and see somewhere. And they were like well there are some other nice beaches and we actually wanted a day off sunbathing. There wasn't anything to see but it was nice

LM : I mean you weren't feeling that great at the time

B : Yeah. No it was good for me. I think Gilly said to Charlie at the gym make sure Beth has a good time and that you go out and everything. But when we got out there Charlie said to me it's not going to be like that and she was really quiet cos of Mike. I meant they are together now but when we went on holiday she couldn't make up her mind and every time I'd see her after the weekends they had a big argument but she came on holiday and that made up her mind that she wanted to be with him. So after 7 days she phoned him and after that it was quite obvious that she wanted to go home. So the first week we had a good time. And he'd said to her well, she didn't want to talk to anyone

LM : What guys ?

B : Yeah and really there were no groups of lads there and no groups of girls. It was a strange resort cos it had a lot of people but mainly couples and families and when it came to the evenings the bars were empty. Really strange. We couldn't work out where people were. SO most of the time we went for a meal and ended up getting drunk over a couple of bottles of wine.

LM : So was it a good thing for you at the time ?

B : Um, yeah. It was good but I didn't forget anything especially I suppose when Charlie was phoning Mike. There were a couple of nights when I got really low and I just wanted to phone Julian and one night we had some silly argument about something. I can't remember what it was about and that upset me. We had both had too much to drink and cos I'm on my tablets I have to be really careful. I just drank too much and I just wanted to go for a wander and it doesn't help with those. But I think it did help me but I took it with me. The first week was worse than the second week. The first week I was just lying on the beach thinking. Cos when you have nothing to do you just lie on the beach and think. So the second week I just wanted to do stuff and I got through so many books cos I had to keep my mind occupied. That was the thing. As soon as I got back there was a message on my mobile phone saying can you phone me please. Um so I said to Mum I had to phone and he had phoned on about the 12th of August, which was half way through the holiday. And I said to mum I'm just going to phone him and she said oh well I better give you this then and she had hidden a solicitor's letter from me. She got about 5 days before she went away and I was going to be away after her and she didn't want me to be on my own really. So I phoned and explained that Mum had hidden it and he was cross about that and I said well look I'll sort it out. it was basically that he wanted to buy me out and wanted to know how much money I wanted. It did upset me but didn't hit me till two days later. But I think I'd expected it to come really. And I actually went away up to Cumbria to stay with my relatives, well Dad's relatives. Cos people were upsetting me cos I'd spoken to Dad about it and Mum and my friend Suzy and they were like oh get as much money out of him as possible. And I just couldn't do that. So I went away and thought well what realistically should I ask. he wanted to know money for furniture and stuff. And then since then I bumped into him about 3 weeks later and he said thanks for doing it and he said everything is fine and it's all going to go ahead

LM : What about exercise on holiday ?

B : I didn't train as much as Charlie. I ran about six days out of 14 but I found it so hot and it was so difficult. We either ran at 8 in the morning or it had to be about 7.30 at night. And I find running in temperatures quite difficult. I was OK in the evening runs but in the morning I struggled. Sometimes I'd say right we are going to go and I'd be up and ready to go and then Charlie couldn't get up and by the time she got up it was quarter to 9 and I was like no it is going to be too hot. She did 12 out of the 14

days. We did sit-ups every day. We did that when we came back. But no I just, I did try to begin with but I just found I too hot.

LM : What was the food like ?

B : Um all right. We didn't eat a lot to be perfectly honest. In the morning we were bed and breakfast so I had just a plain roll most of the time but in the end we were fed up with that so we used to go and get fruit and yoghurts. And then generally we didn't have a thing to eat until the evening and then every night we had salads really. So with regards to food we didn't eat hardly anything really. Occasionally we would say right let's go and have an ice cream. But we drank a lot and that is why I put on weight. Yeah I put on 5 pounds.

LM : How did you feel ?

B : Sometimes I do and sometimes not cos I never pick on holiday like when you are bored here you go and have something. But yeah I put on 5 pounds and I'm positive it was the drink but I don't think it was the alcohol. We did drink a lot of alcohol. But during the day I normally drink tea or water or diet drinks like low calorie drinks but we didn't have any of that and we drank a hell of a lot of orange juice which Charlie normally drinks and she says it doesn't affect her but with me I mean we drank a carton a day and that's loads of calories and in the evenings at the bars you sometimes picked at the nuts but generally I am sure it was the drinks

LM : Did you notice it then ?

B : Um yeah I did. It didn't I mean I felt heavier when I came back but when I went away to Cumbria for a week and I suppose I ate more up there and didn't train at all so I had had nearly 3 weeks without training and by that time I had put on half a stone and I can't lose it at the moment and that is depressing. Cos people said that when I went away I had lost too much weight but when I look at the photos of me on holiday I really like it. And some of those skirts which I wore were quite tight ones and now I look like an S bend in them and I know it is only half a stone but it seems to go on so easily and it is not coming off at the moment. I don't like it at all and I'm really conscious cos its all gone on my middle. I have round up round the shoulders but it's all gone round the love handles bit and I'm ever so conscious. So I'm not doing any weights at the moment just aerobic stuff. But I'm frustrated cos at the moment I have got so much school work on and it's difficult and you are trying to run round doing things and then when you get into the gym it's been so busy some days

and you are waiting around to get on things and you lose it. I like to burn for an hour and go and when you are poncing around you kind of lose it and you know someone will be waiting for the treadmill so you are a bit tense on it

LM : We've talked a lot about exercise, training and diet but what is your ideal shape and weight ?

B : Ideal shape now I'm thinking of 'Baywatch' now, Stephanie who died actually on Saturday morning at 2.00 in the morning. She is very tall and very lean but not big. I wouldn't want to be big at all. Lean and mean. I don't want to be skin and bones but lean looking not big. I like my legs cos they are muscular but would want them smaller and thinner. I wouldn't want to be big like a body builder I don't like it. I just want to be lean. And I know I have a muscle type like my Dad who used to have huge legs when he did sport so I have a muscle type which could get big so I have to be careful and that's why I don't do big weights at the gym. I'd like a bit of definition but I' prefer to be leaner.

LM : What does that image say to you ?

B : I just think she looks fit and really good and I know if I was like that I would feel really confident. When I was starting to lose weight and I went down to 8 stone 10 before I went on holiday I know that to get lean like her I need to be about 8 and a half stone and I know I can be like that. I was starting to get there and Merion was starting to say you are looking scrawny and to me I wasn't at all cos I was losing meat round the middle. I mean my legs I could never lose it. I mean I could lose a bit but they are solid. That's just they way I am there.

Lm Is that look feminine ?

B : I think it is in its own way. I think there are 2 types of feminine. There is your pretty feminine I would call slender not big, long blonde hair and very pretty and like my friend Suzy I suppose. It is very difficult cos you have naturally pretty and then stunning looking people and then different sort of things like that. I have friend called Rachel who is almost fragile looking, very slim and long blonde hair, and pretty clothes but to me it doesn't appeal. There are different sorts of femininity. Um I mean Amy is really naturally pretty and that appeals more. People say to me like my boyfriends they wouldn't want me any different cos I am sporty and they like girls like that. Um I think it depends on the type of person you are and your character.

LM : How would you describe yourself then?

B : Ooh that's difficult. I suppose looks wise I am kind of more sporty looking than pretty looking in that sense. But I do like to try and dress more elegantly. When I am going out I look for the smart elegant look than the pretty sort of look and if I go out I know I am not naturally pretty but people say you are more sort of not stunning but I catch people's eye cos I dress smart and I'm taller than most people and I catch people's eye in that way. Personality, I am strange at the moment. I used to be very very out going but I know since boyfriends and different things I am more insecure than I used to be. I used to be well when I was with Julian and had boyfriends I used to sort of be a lot more touchy with people and friendly towards them. Whereas now I am not so much because at the time I was secure and I was really bubbly whereas now I don't feel safe and I don't really want to be like that because I don't want to give anyone any false hopes.

LM : When you go out say on holiday how do you like to look ?

B : Still smart, I dress quite smart on holiday. I don't like to dress provocatively. I don't like to wear short skirts and tiny little tops with everything hanging out. I think it looks tarty. It looks as though they are up for it. I mean even if they have a really good figure it just doesn't appeal to me. It does appeal to some men but not to others. I tended to wear trousers with sometimes a vest top or maybe a cap sleeve top or a skirt or a dress. Sometimes I wore just a little dress but it wasn't provocative. I mean some of my trousers are quite tight round the bum but if I'm doing that I have to wear a longer top so I feel more well, once I wore a half top with my trousers but I know I wouldn't wear that now cos where they are tight there my love handles will hang over the top. But I was having an argument not an argument but a conversation with a chap in Churchill's last Saturday night. I said something to him about a girl who was wearing next to nothing and um about he feels about it and she said oh she looks good. And I said do you really think she looks good. Look at her she has got nothing on and it's all hanging out and he actually said, cos most guys I speak to say they don't like it or they have the argument that they like to look but if it was their girlfriend they wouldn't like her to go out like that. SO anyway I said to this guy if that was your girlfriend would you like her to wear that sort of thing and he said well yes if she is with me. But I said but if she went out alone and he was the only guy I've spoken to who said he wouldn't mind. But I feel happiest with a bit more clothes on. I feel really more uncomfortable in less clothes

LM : What about hair and make up and other things ?

B : Well um, if I can do my hair basically I wear the same during the day as I do in the evening. I don't wear anything on my face. I can't wear foundation or anything. I just wear eye makeup on my eyes but it is very pale like light brown or pale pinks. I try and make my eyes stand out a bit more when I go out in the evenings using eyeliner. And just a pale lipstick. I can't wear bold things I like to be subtle and then my hair is blow dried down.

LM : Do you think this look has changed or might change over time

B : I think I'll still be smart. It has changed a bit since I've grown up. I've always been a sort of trousery person. Trousers and jackets. I'll never be a skirt person or too dressy. I don't dress as sporty as I used to I suppose cos of work. But I make quite an effort. Sometimes I slouch around. But generally I only go out about once a week so I try and dress up. But it is not a be all and end all. I don't go out buying clothes just for my Friday night. You find that school clothes mix in with weekend clothes. I don't have set wardrobes. But I do like to make an effort when I go out. I'll also have a bath and shave my legs but I'm not one for doing my nails, they aren't good enough. No not one for all of that. I like to look nice and clean and take care of my make up and clothes but as regards body preparation I'll just do some lotion but not worry about what colour my nails would be and what jewellery I'm going to wear. I'll just wear my studs and a couple of rings and a watch and that's it. I don't worry about the extras.

LM : Is it important to be disciplined in what you do do ?

B : Yeah I suppose there is this thing that women are supposed to do and they are supposed to exfoliate their face and this that and the other and I just don't get time to do things like that. I do want to make sure of some things like my skin has got to be nice and if I can keep myself fit yes that would come before some things like going to a friends house. you know I would chose to go to the gym first. But I wouldn't phone the friend up and say I can't come round tonight cos I'm painting my nails. I care about the way I look a lot in one sense and not in another

LM ; Do you think women are under pressure to look a certain way ?

B : Yeah I do think there is this thing. I don't know. I think that for people it is inside them how they really sort of fell. I comes from I don't know I have always been influenced well not influenced but yeah by men and friends cos they do influence

you. My first boyfriend was very very bad and he really influenced me on my weight. I was 8 stone and I was fat to him. Because that was the way it was. he influenced me on my hair, he didn't want me to grow it, my clothes, everything. Lots of things. But after him I think it is in yourself that you want to look nice but I am always doing it for someone else. I am always worried about someone else. Whether it is what my boyfriend thinks of me, whether it's going out with my friends in Friday night and Suzy and Amy were both very attractive so I don't want to look an absolute scruff with them. Or if you are meeting someone you haven't seen for a long time. All of those sort of things. Cos you are creating an image and you want to look good.

LM : Is the image really you ?

B : Yes I think it is me. Most of the time. There are times when I just don't want to and I think I've found that when I've been trying to accept I am on my own and I've thought well I can't really be bothered as much. But things like going to the gym I do all of that for myself and I enjoy doing it. I couldn't, well I don't train everyday with work and everything. I mean I don't get desperate and there is something inside me saying I must go. I do it for a number of reasons. Mainly to keep fit and keep looking nice but also then it's a bit of a social thing for me as well to see people at the moment

LM : So it's enjoyable too ?

B : Yeah I do feel good there. At the moment it is a bit difficult. The motivation is lacking a bit. One because I am not training with anyone and people like Charlie are training a lot later like 7 or half 7 and I am stuck with the time I have to go really cos it is after work. When I have done it I do feel good that I have done it and people say to me do you have to go to the gym tonight and I am like well yes I do cos I haven't been for a couple of days. Sometimes it is hard to get going but once you get going it's good and I am doing the Sturry 10k in a couple of weeks and that has given me the motivation. I need some sort of goals

LM : You talked about the influence of boyfriends. Any other influences

B : Yeah by people who are close to me. I'm not worried about the media is much. that doesn't affect me so much. although when you see shots of women in nice clothes and even silly things like people on the gladiators and how fit they are although I wouldn't want to be that big but even the sense that you go into shops and I always want to be a size 10 and I never want to be bigger than a size 10 and if I had to try on a size 12 that would affect me. A 10 is my standard

Lm : What about when you get older ?

B ; I think I will always try and keep fit. I'll always be there. I'd like to start some sport again cos I don't think going to the gym will be me for years and years. I could see me running but perhaps not as much. I It does worry me actually cos she has problems after having children. She can't do any exercise cos she just wets herself !! And that does worry me that I'm going to be like that

LM : Oh yes your sister has just had a baby ?

B : Yeah I couldn't let myself get like that. She is fine as a mother but she is still about 14 stone and it's awful and she has stretch marks absolutely everywhere. her whole back and front is covered in round circles of big stretch marks all the way down her legs. She is all right at the moment. She says she can't do any exercise cos her stomach muscles have stretched so much and there is a big gap and they have to join together and she has all this jelly inside her and that has to go and then they have to join together but I think she will need some motivation to get going.

LM : Are you close ?

B : Not that close. I actually spoke to her husband on Sunday day we were playing golf together and I said something about Kate and all her stretch marks and he said yeah well it happens and I said oh she can't do any exercise can she and he said no and I was like oh it will be good when she can. I hope they go. Cos Kate is the type of person who will just get depressed and will eat more and she let herself get too big during pregnancy.

LM : Does it put you off having children

B : That does yeah. Yeah but then the final outcome is lovely. But her baby was big 10 pound 3 but not everyone has to get like that. It hasn't put me off having kids but

is has made me think I am going to keep on doing this and keep swimming and keep on doing whatever.

LM : Are children important to you ?

B : Yeah. I don't know why it's always been I've always wanted to have children and pass on things to children I suppose that's why I'm being a teacher. I've always pictured having a family and doing sport together and stuff

LM : Is it part of being a woman ?

B ; Yes definitely it is. I wouldn't be one to say this is the only reason women are on this earth but yeah it is important. But there again I wouldn't say Oh God I'm 20 and I've got to have kids now. Not at all like that. But I definitely do want them

LM : What else is important about being a woman ?

B : Well it's not to keep men happy. Um, I don't know. That's too hard. I've never thought about it. You just do it. I don't know. It's not just to look good although it's important. Um God I don't know.

LM : Well I'm going to leave you with that for next time

B : Yeah that's really good but I can't answer it now. I'll try and write I down

She added at the end when the tape was off that perhaps her choice of job was sub consciously about being a woman. Cos in education it's a good second salary and you can have time off if you have children. Its what her mother had done. She said although she thinks she is a woman she still embraces sub consciously traditional aspects of being a woman.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE 002c – ‘BETH’
26 May 1999

I had some informal conversations with women at the gym about how physical changes in their bodies impacted on their involvement in, and attitudes towards physical activity and exercise. Thus, a theme for one of the more formal interviews was concerned with adolescence, the biological body, physical activity and physical education.

INTERVIEWER (LM): We were talking the other day about starting your periods and how that made you feel about your body and physical activity. Can you talk about that a bit? I mean, if I said to you could you remember your first period, could you describe it?

PARTICIPANT (B): Yeah I can and I was about 11 years old but I expected it was going to come. I was about 11 and a half. I'd expected it cos I was big and quite mature and um other friends around me had started before me were skinnier and I'd expected that I would be one of the first. But it wasn't anything sort of drastic. I think one day I sort of went to the loo and sort of saw it. And I've never really had heavy periods and it started really gradually.

LM: You say you expected it. Did you know what it was all about then? Had you talked to people about it

B: I don't know whether I actually talked to people about it. I just kind of knew about it. I wasn't one to, well we didn't really talk about it at school I think we had had a few sort of lessons and I think cos I had an older sister I know what was going to happen. It did worry me that well I didn't want to start early. I wanted to be one of these people who started late.

LM: Why?

B: I don't know, I guess cos I had always been a big child it was always that things happen to them first and the skinny people nothing happens to. And I was really surprised when one of my friends started and she was like a skinny rake you know. She told me that she had.

LM: Did you talk to your mum and your parents in a family situation?

B: It wouldn't have been at all with my dad. And I think cos Kate had started then we did talk

LM: Did she sit you down for a formal talk?

B: You know I don't know I can't remember. I don't think she ever did the birds and the bees. I just sort of picked things up and reading books we kind of had a lot of human body books in the house

LM: What about using sanitary towels and tampons?

B: I started on sanitary towels and I think I started at the Christmas and I kept them going really until the summer and then of course I wanted to go swimming and things and she had sort of spoken about it and said it would be something I would just have to try. And I just remember one day I had arranged to go swimming with some friends and I remember having to go to the loo and I couldn't use the applicator and I just got rid of that in the end and just stick it up (we laughed – I had had a similar experience).

LM: Tell me a bit more about that. Were you worried? What about the swimming?

B: I think I was a little bit. I mean you know when they say you can break your hymen I wasn't worried about that sort of thing but I wasn't sure it was correctly in and I was worried that if I went swimming then something would happen. But I've never been one to well I've got friends who will never use tampons and just can't get on with them. One of my friends is a bit weird well not weird but she is against all sorts of things like the pill and tampons and her mum is sort of inbred it into her that it can damage them inside and it can damage her.

LM: Do you think sport has influenced your attitude to your body?

B: yeah I think it probably did. Perhaps I was more confident with my body. And also with sport it is for comfort (using tampons). I mean swimming obviously and with gymnastics, which I was still doing at the time, I remember I used to have a big bulky sanitary towel with a leotard and I had to wear shorts over the top. So in things like that and also sport does make you well, some people won't shower together and they think their bodies are something to be hidden whereas in sport it's more open.

LM: Yeah which reminds me about issues of PE at school. Did you find that this type of thing (menstruation, growing breasts, widening hips) was a problem for you and for girls at school?

B: Some used to say they couldn't do PE because of it. Lots of people wouldn't do swimming (because of a period). I remember that. We weren't very good at showers at school. We didn't have to have them so there wasn't that embarrassment. But it was quite an issue in the second and third years really.

LM: Go on?

B: Well it was different things like I've said and some people were really shy about it. I mean I wasn't a particularly open person about it but I suppose I just expected it. And actually my periods stopped again when I was 14

LM: Why?

B: Initially it was cos I was ill. I lost weight then I had appendicitis and I lost a lot of weight then and I think it was cos I was under weight and I didn't have a period for 4 years

LM: How did you feel about that?

B: I was fine about it cos it was easier and I actually at 16 went on the pill which was a bit confusing because I got a bit of artificial discharge at the right time of the month so I knew I wasn't pregnant but I actually did go to doctor when I was 17 and said look I am worried cos I don't know if I am having natural periods so I cam off for 2 months and nothing happened so I went to see a gynecologist and had some tests and a scan and they said you are fine but you may have to have a fertility drug if you wanted children but they said it was my weight cos I was under 8 stone. And it's difficult cos I haven't been off the pill since so I couldn't really say. I mean they are very very light. I hardly get anything. Some people have those super tampons but one tiny tampon would do me the whole way through. I think I've always had naturally light periods even when I started

LM: So what were you worried about?

B: Oh having children?

LM: Is that important to you?

B: Oh yes I do want to have children and I think I was worried that you know if there was a problem they could sort it out then

LM: Did you ever feel that you were different to other women when you didn't have periods? Or do you feel that now?

B: I don't know if that really worried me then cos I know that I just wanted to be skinny so I guess it's actually the image that you don't want to become a woman. I wanted to be a skinny person without all the women's lumps and bumps. And now I'm sure, well I'm pretty sure I'd get periods now cos I'm over the right weight

LM: Is being a woman more about appearance than bodily function for you?

B: Yeah I would say so cos I mean I wouldn't want, well people say oh I'd love to have big breasts and that wouldn't appeal to me. I mean practicality wise all that sport you do I think of being on that treadmill and being really uncomfortable and it just doesn't do anything for me.

LM: Do you ever think that having boobs would make you more feminine in any way?

B: I don't know. Yeah I guess sometimes I can look at myself in something tight and think well yeah I look just straight up and down but it just has never appealed to me. Yes of course people do look feminine. But I only like people who have big breasts who are really slim. And I know that if I am going to get bigger boobs it's cos I'm going to be fat

LM: And do you think those kinds of curves, boobs and hips and bottoms are sexy?

B: Um. To some people they are but they are not to me. You could see it on someone like Pamela Anderson. But there are not many people who are tiny and curvy. I mean I don't think pear shaped is sexy. With hips and nothing else. If you are really curvaceous all over I guess. I don't think Kate Moss is sexy cos that's the other extreme. Well she has put a bit of weight on now but she was an absolute rake. I have gone off the idea that a rake is sexy. In my eyes being fit and toned is. And yes there are girls who are not as toned but they are leggy and they are curvaceous and they do look good

LM: So who would be an ideal?

B: Oh difficult I'm no good at names

LM: Yeah it is difficult. Someone asked me and there are lots of women who I think look great like Steffi Graf and Gabrielle Reese but then you think of someone who is held up as beautiful like Anna Kournikova and she is but she's too immature

B: Yes you see she still has that little girl's body. Oh Steffi Graf has lovely legs yeah and I'm much more of a sporty person. I mean people like Meg Ryan and that have nice bodies. They are not too skinny they are just very slim but um and I used to really like the girl on Bay watch who was tall and slim with muscly legs and she was really lean and I really like that.

LM: Do you think that your image of ideals has changed?

B: yes I think I was very influenced by my ex boyfriend who wanted just a rake and I did well any sort of fat on me at all was disgusting and now when I go to the gym I look at the older women sort of 40 plus and they are still really training hard and they don't look nice cos their skinny and their skin is starting to sag and there has got to be a time now I don't know if I'll ever accept it but I think I probably will cos I don't think I'm as concerned but you've got to say right well you can't do too much cos they looked over trained and too thin and not attractive

LM: So what about getting older. I mean you said that kids would be important what about the look and feel of being pregnant?

B: Mmmm. Well it's quite an issue that I've thought about cos my sister has put on so much weight since she has been pregnant and she just looks awful and I am just so dead set in my mind that I won't let myself go. I know I'm not well I've got a couple of friends who have just been pregnant and they were skinny before hand and six weeks later they were less weight than they were. I know I'm probably not going to be the type of person who can do that. But I'm very well just seeing my sister I just know I couldn't be like that. It will be hard cos I don't eat a lot and I will half worry that I am not feeding the baby but then I'll think I can't just increase my food cos the weight will go on. But no you read about athletes who still train up to a point and I know that I would make a conscious effort to do something and I know it's really hard once you've had a baby to lose it. And my sister has got about 4 stone to lose and it's not something you can do easily. I mean some people have a stone or half a stone and you can do that but 4 stone!

LM: What about the look of being pregnant?

B: No it's not attractive. It doesn't. I just feel it is something I want to do cos I want to have the final product but no I don't feel inclined to do it at the moment. Whereas I suppose before I would have been cos I was more settled and I had more thoughts about babies. But the actual look of being pregnant. I don't know. People can look good but only if they control their weight. I know some people are more lucky than others but I look at my mum and she had me and I was a 10 pound baby and she put on a stone and you sort of think well and she was back in size 12 clothes the next day and I think if she can do it and I was a big baby then you can. It's more control

LM: And is control and discipline the important thing?

B: Yeah I probably do in myself. I mean when you have a boyfriend you do sometimes follow well I'm not a leader. I've become a lot stronger in the last year or so. But in the way I look I guess I do like to look nice for other people although I am now starting to think of looking nice for myself. But I guess my eating and things I do have to keep in control. It's stupid things like well when we go out for a few drinks and you lose that sense of control cos you are pissed up and when you get in you are like right what can I eat. I'm always controlled all week and you have a few beers and you are like right and I don't mind it too much but you do wake up and think why the hell did I eat that. But most times you do think as long as it's controlled in the week that's ok.

LM: Do you think it's more important for women to control themselves?

B: I do think women should look nice. I mean I hate sloppy men but I do think women should take care but there again that doesn't mean dolling themselves up and loads of make up and things. As long as they look as though they take care of themselves. I mean lots of times I sit around like this, casual but I think you can tell if a person takes care. Or if well just in everything or if they are a complete and utter slob and just doesn't care.

LM: I guess it's about pride?

B: Yeah, yeah it does give you confidence. I know I need encouragement from others. That makes you feel so much better in yourself. You can think you look quite good but a little something from someone and it does make you feel much better.

LM: Just coming back to adolescence. What about the first time you wore a bra?

B: Oh I didn't like it to begin with. I didn't wear one til I went to secondary school. Now if I look at the children at the school I teach at they quite like wearing them cos they are the cropped top style and I don't want to wear the proper bra

LM: Why?

B: I think it was always this thing of she is going to mature first and I didn't want to be like that. I wanted to be normal. Well like the others. And then a lot of it was puppy fat so there wasn't a lot of real development there really and When I went into the first year I mean I was never big but I did wear a bra and then I started to wear the sports cropped tops which didn't bother me at all. Then I lost all the weight and I shrunk down to almost nothing then so and everyone else really developed and I never developed with them

LM: Did you ever feel your developing body was a hindrance to you in sport?

B: Well it always was in gymnastics. I mean to being with OK it was just my size and height but then I suppose with the getting bigger, well the bust wasn't really a problem, it wasn't too big but I did feel and know that well with gymnasts they are all so skinny and develop so late. And I was standing out at about 10 and I had a little bust and everything and everyone else was like a 6-year-old child. And Darryl the coach used to joke sometimes about the developing women in the gym club. I mean there was one girl with bar work she was quite top heavy and it did effect me

LM: What did he say?

B: He just used to make comments about not being able to do stuff cos you'd over balance being top heavy.

LM: How do you feel about that?

B: There's a danger and that's why I think so many gymnasts and dancers are especially cos they are in tight leotards all the time and you can see the changes in body, you really do and it was very noticeable that at gym when girls were 11-13 lots gave up. They were embarrassed and he starting having a go cos people wanted to wear t-shirts. And you just knew that the ones who were getting older started wearing t shirts tucked into their leotards and then they started wearing shorts cos you started getting pubic hair and the high cut leotard weren't good

LM: How did you feel?

B: I was conscious cos all the people around me so much well I was starting to develop. It was one of the key times and it was such a big issue. And I did go skinny and I'd never been skinny and I was like those people. Wow. I went back to the gym club and I was so light and Darryl used to used make comments like God I'll chuck her over cos I was like a rake and he used to take the micky out of me cos I had black leggings on and skinny legs and I loved that cos I'd never been that. And he could use me for demonstrations and he'd never been able to do that before and I used to feel bad because most people that he supported he could lift them and he didn't used to be able to with me and now he could. I mean I wasn't fat but I was just this height and weight but when you are younger you seem bigger. And he was lifting 5 stone girls.

LM: What about your performance?

B: Definitely in things like running when I was heavier it was worse and yes in gymnastics I think. When I lost weight I wasn't actually competing so it was bit different but I know things like my running got better when I lost weight. Although I don't think I had as much power. I mean I was doing things like shot. Actually my high just got worse. You might have thought it would get better. Trouble was I had nearly a year out cos I then had glandular fever. My immune system had got so low I had a lot of things. Some things just got worse but other things got better. I had so much less weight I never sweated and some things were easier. Less weight to carry round and with running it was noticeable

LM: What other sports did you do when you were a kid?

B: Well basically I did gym up until the age of 11 and then swimming and I started swimming at about 8 and carried it on until I was about 16. And at school I did, well netball was my main one when I got there and then hockey and basketball. They were the 3 main ones and I did county at all of those and almost east of England at hockey. Basketball was probably my best when I was younger but I stopped cos the school was so hockey oriented.

LM: Was it a mixed school?

B Yeah

LM: And would you say they were the so-called girl's sports

B: I think everyone thinks of girl's sport as netball. But I don't know, everyone was quite into it and there were a lot of teams. I suppose basketball was the game that not as many girls did. And I noticed that cos when I was 13 I was in the county U19 squad and I was good but not that good. Whereas to get into county hockey you had to go through district and east Kent and then Kent. And there were so many different trials but basketball was a one off

LM: And what about opportunities to play football and rugby for example?

B: No we didn't. I've never played football

LM: Was it an issue?

B: Um I probably would have at about the age of 11 or 12 cos I was just so sports oriented. I know when I came to Uni. I didn't. I mean I played a couple of football games when the hockey team played the football. But they wanted me to play rugby when I first came and I had to admit that I was too vain. I mean I didn't want a broken nose or all those black bruises. I mean I love the aggression of sport and all the other physical things but it didn't appeal to me. And I had seen my dad and he has broken his nose 4 times and I thought well I know it can happen in other sports but it was different. It just didn't appeal to me all that chucking each other on the floor.

LM: And do you see those types of sports as so very different from netball and hockey?

B: Well I suppose with both of them they are a little bit rougher. Cos the thought of when I watch people play football and the way they go down after tackles, well you'd rarely get that in a netball game or a hockey game. They are more falling on the floor, chucking yourself on the ground and ankles going left right and centre type games. And um they are more physical really. Even though you sometimes see girly girls playing netball it doesn't have to be like that. But it's not a physical game like football and rugby are.

LM: yeah I guess there seems to be this continuum between very feminine activities like gymnastics and dance through to the more physical games like netball and hockey and then into a highly contact oriented sport like football and hockey

B; Yeah you're right and I think I'd be more in the middle. I know when I was younger I was more focused and competitive but I've got out of the competitive scene now. Really it's a more social thing for me now. But if someone had turned round at 10 or 11 and said do you want to play football I bet I would have. But it was a real tomboy sort of a thing to do

LM: Yeah how would you have been labeled?

B: Oh yeah there was one girl who played football and she was a real tomboy. Whereas I wasn't I was just sporty. And we did have some girls even at secondary school who were real 'boys'. And I never wanted to be classed as that. We had even through secondary 4 or 5 sport Billies who were good at sport but were like tracksuit oriented and short hair and that the whole time. And when you saw them go out they would look like boys as well. Whereas me and another girl and this was like when the indoor hockey team went to the nationals well we were the more feminine girls. And we weren't all loads of make up and dolling ourselves up but we were feminine. And we used to get the stick more than them. It was like when there was any boys around they used to be like go on you to off you go with them. But I never wanted to be that real sport Billy I wanted to take good care of myself

LM: What about boys who did the more feminine sports like gymnastics?

B: Oh yeah there was one (she laughs) and he is completely queer now God he is a hairdresser. He is as gay as can be

LM: And what about girls who did rugby and football at Uni?

B: I think there are some who did. But then if you take Suzy Rees, she got it right and said sod it I want to play rugby but she still looked feminine. Almost angelic and blonde and she sort of proved that you don't have to be like that but then when I first went to college the rugby girls were all the big butch girls and you had to be big and solid and all rough and tumble and beer drinking. Football girls were like that too. Hockey tended to be a real mixture. I mean we had 7 lesbians in our team when we were there. Some of them played rugby too.

LM: And the last point I guess is looking to the future. What do you think the menopause will be like and feel like?

B: Right now I don't think it would worry me too much unless and I have thought this, that it comes too soon. That's in the sense that I haven't had the children. I mean my mum had it at 39. Quite young. And my cousin has had it at 16. But she is a real anomaly. And she can't have children and they don't know why. I mean she is 18 now and she knows that she can't have children now. I mean I think she's like one out of such a small number. But it does really make me think well it could happen tomorrow. It would concern more because I couldn't have children. But then I think how would I feel if I had to have a hysterectomy at a young age. I think I'd feel well that's it that's the end kind of thing. I know it's wrong to say that that is the purpose in your life but that would be hard

LM: Would you feel less of a woman?

B: Yes I think so probably. I mean periods and things like that really don't bother me and I don't think much of them but you know they are there for a reason and if that was taken away from me I think it would be hard

LM: And is the aging process cruel to women in terms of appearance?

B: Yeah (she laughs) I think it must be. But I just sort of think that some people are luckier than others. Lots of things are detrimental to your looks and if you concentrated on them all you just couldn't do anything. You couldn't drink, smoke, eat stuff or go out in the sun. And I know some people talk about my tan, I mean I

haven't done sun beds for a couple of years but I did used to do them and it is one thing that I thought wasn't so good. But I still love my sun and I know I'm not a sun worshipper like I used to be but it is nice to get a tan. It does make you feel better. And I just think do I look nice now or do I think about looking nice when I'm older. I mean my mum sun bathed all her life and she looks gorgeous now. Some people smoke a hell of a lot and they end up wrinkled. I guess touch wood some of it's luck and some of it's hereditary. But yeah lots of life is detrimental and I don't want to look really old at 60. Sometimes I think it really is how you feel inside. Some things happen that you can't control. I mean you don't know when you are going to go gray for example. I mean I do look after my skin but only with moisturizer and eye gel. I'm not one of these people who is like you got to have all of this. I mean my mum is 56 and I wouldn't mind looking like her at that age and it's about taking care of ourselves.

LM: I guess it's also important to still be physically active?

B: Oh yeah that's it. I think it worries you. My dad can't do anything now; even on the golf course he is in absolute agony. And with my back now I can't go running and I think I should get it seen to avoid long-term damage. So many sporty people end up hobbling around when they are older. So where do you actually draw the line? But definitely I want to be active it's always been important. I have got pleasure out of it and you still can when you are older. I mean my 85-year-old grandparents aren't sporty but are still active. I mean he still drives. That's why they still look so good and that's why they are still alive. Other people who lose it all and get confined to the house have no point.

I was aware that Beth needed to get to the gym before another appointment and so terminated the interview here.

LM: OK, I guess you need to keep yourself active now. Brilliant. Thanks for talking. We'll stop their thanks and speak again soon.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE 002d – 'BETH'

25 October 1999

I had been doing interval training on the treadmill at the gym and Beth got on the treadmill next to me and decided to try and do my session with me. It felt good, for me, to train with a partner. I enjoyed it. It was competitive, sweaty and hard work. Just what I enjoy about sport and exercise. I knew that Beth had been involved in competitive team sports and I wondered how she felt about our spontaneous training session. I asked her at this interview. A discussion surrounding issues of body image, status, and body maintenance routines emerged.

INTERVIEWER LM: So how did you feel after our 'training' session together! (See observation notes)

PARTICIPANT B: (She laughs loudly) that was good: it was good I did really enjoy it. I went round to Giles' after and was really raving about it saying listen I've just done this. And I've done it (the same interval training session) twice since we did it you know.

LM: Have you, that's brilliant. Brilliant. It was good and it was good for me just to do it with someone else.

B: Yeah?

LM: Yes, because, well just to do it with someone else is motivating. I find I can get bored on my own at the gym.

B: It must be harder to do it on your own because I have done it a couple of times on my own. And it's that last couple (of intervals). The first 5 or 6 are all right but it is the last couple (she shakes her head and purses her lips to demonstrate the 'pain' and effort required)

LM: How did you feel after doing it? Did you feel proud?

B: Yeah, yeah you feel yeah I did it. And I thought I needed to do a bit more training like that.

LM: Yeah you said that. Why do you want to?

B: I don't know. I want to keep my fitness good and I know I can run for 5 miles and that is fine but it is just that real sprinting so that if someone said come on, come and play a game of hockey then I could do it.

LM: See for me, when I do it and when I've done it, you do feel proud after you have done it and it gives me that kind of confidence that my body will do what I want it to do, when I want to do, it because I think I guess, well I'm not fearful, but you get a bit nervous about little niggling injuries or little back aches and you get a bit insecure about it. And sometimes you think, well maybe I won't be able to do this tomorrow, or next year or in 10 days time

B: Yeah. Mmmm. Because I've had back trouble recently.

LM: Oh you said, go on can you tell me more?

B: I went to see an osteopath and things and I was just starting to worry that things were starting to. Well, I am thinking is it because, well people have said I was over training. And I think oh no, it's probably not that, it's where I've got a weakness and where I landed heavily and I fell, I think it is sort of a weak point. And I know I don't stretch enough

LM: Have you ever been seriously injured?

B: Not really (she pauses). I've torn ligaments but that's it really. I've never really had a big injury and I don't know how I'd cope with it

LM: I was going to say that. Go on (tell me more).

B: No. See I was having this argument with Giles because he has got an Achilles problem. And soon as he gets a twinge, he has 3 weeks off and I can't do that. I mean I had a week off with my back and I was like oh it's getting better now, I will just try a little run. And it was OK. The netball seems to, well, heavy landing in netball seems to jar it more than anything. But yeah, I don't know, if someone said to you, you know you've got to have 6 weeks off or 6 months off (she raises her eyebrows). God. I suppose the only thing is that after going to the osteopath and thinking well if I don't get it sorted now then, anyway, it does seem to have gone away.

LM: What happened with the back. What kind of feelings did you go through when you had the week off for your back?

B: I was frustrated more than anything else. It was sort of the fact that I couldn't do it. I did want to get in there and things and I also worry that if you do get out of the habit of it, it is so much harder to back and you sort of have a month off or whatever and then it's like, well you know, I have a set routine with training and things.

LM: And in terms of that routine, is it important?

B: Mmmm. In what way?

LM: I mean does it make you feel good, or in control or disciplined?

B: Oh yeah it does yeah. It makes, well OK I don't think I am obsessed as some people can be. You know if someone says to me, we are doing this come on, come out you know I might have that night off now. Whereas I probably wouldn't have done. Um, but I always try to do Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. I'm in that gym because I know at the weekend it is harder to train. I try and get a run Saturday or Sunday morning or play netball. But I know that Friday nights are different. Whereas Charlie, I mean Friday night she had to go. She was in the gym I mean. She didn't get in there until 7.00pm. You know, and we were going out at 8.00pm but she had to sort of squeeze it in which made her late for going out. But I'm, well when it comes to Fridays, it has to be your friends first.

REFLECTION: What Beth says here somewhat clouds the reality of what she does in the gym. While she might miss the Friday night at the gym to get out on time, she will be there for longer on Saturday morning!

LM: Yeah and would you say then that you are more relaxed about it now than let's say a year ago. Because, I guess I've been talking to you about these things for over a year now and you have said that it's all really important to you.

B: Yeah. Well, I go through phases. I go through real phases where I am not happy with my body and, or I've got something to go for like a holiday or. Well like when I was going out to Dublin, I went mad training because I was like I want to be the fittest and the leanest that I can be. So it is those sorts of phases that I go through

LM: Why when you have an event like that do you feel like that? What's the important thing?

B: Well basically, I want to look slim. I want to look good

LM: For whom? Why?

B: Um, for myself and for others really. You know I was going out there (Dublin) and I was going to see this guy you know and I thought well, I don't know it was just this real thing. And then had my holiday afterwards and you know that you are going to have your clothes off and you want to look thin, slim. Well I want to look the best I can. I mean obviously you could keep on going on and on. I do know for myself that at 9 or just under 9 stone then that's how I feel best at

LM: Do you mean you feel more sexy?

B: Um yeah, well more attractive and more confident in myself. Definitely in my clothing. I know that every bit of clothing that I can put on will feel good. There will be so much more clothing I can wear. It won't dig round the middle. Yeah well, you know I had hoped that well you think we would end up and he would be touching my body and you know if you well you are like if you weren't confident of yourself, because I am and people are like why but I am very unsure of my body in bed. And people are like why? But I am.

LM: Do you get nervous with guys in bed then?

B: Um, yeah yeah. I, well not so much nervous but I get a bit unsure of myself and sometimes if you've got a leg like this (she demonstrates!) and I know there is fat there and I am so so conscious of it and I sort of look down and your hand goes down there or you close your eyes.

LM: Like don't look at that bit or touch that bit?

B: Oh yeah yeah. I just think. Well Giles sort of said to me one time, well you know when I stay there and I'm standing there and I've just got my knickers on and I look down at my tummy and I'll grab it and he is like what are you doing? But it is just you know especially when you are having a bloated day. I just think about what some women must be like. But it is how you feel in yourself and that impacts on how you feel in front of others. It's the same in the showers for some people.

LM: Really, absolutely (the same) what do you mean? When we trained on Friday, you had to dash off so you didn't shower why was that.

B: MMM. Yeah. I normally always shower after unless I am going back home for a nice hot bath. But yeah, sometimes you don't want to be naked in front of others if you are not looking good, and I will shower and then I always wanted to do all the

cream cos my skin does get dry. And I have just got into a habit that I always put on body lotion. Anyway it's nice to take you time at home.

LM: So as much as the shape of your body is important, is the tone and colour of your skin important too?

B: yeah it is but I don't sun bed anymore. I used to. Not a lot but I used to have one about once a month. When I was with James he used to absolutely hate it. So I rarely did it then but then I seemed to have regular holidays. I had sort of 2 or 3 a year and that kept my colour going.

LM: Why did he hate it?

B: He was just, I don't know, really really anti. So I tend to do it like well I had this year, Gran Canaria at Easter and Portugal in the summer and that kind of set me up for the summer. But no I am worried about them now. I don't do it like I used to at all. But then there dies come a time when you just feel pale and I know it because it's facially. My stomach always seems to keep it. It's just my face that I hate it on. When I came back from Portugal for some reason it just went. Cos I only went there for a week. It just seemed to be this real initial tan only that washed off in the shower

LM: So what is your routine in the shower?

B: Well I have to be very careful what I use cos some of the soaps and stuff I can get thrush.

LM: Really?

B: Yeah, shower gels do, well certain ones. Yeah I had it a little bit and there are a few I can use and I stick to those. And I just wash my hair and then well I used to use that lovely body shop one Brazil Nut Butter but it's 6 pounds fifty for a tub

LM: Yeah have you seen their new one, the African Spa that is about £8.50? It's in a beautiful glass jar if you are a sucker for packaging. It's lovely it feels like silk.

B: Yeah but you get through one about once a month and after my holiday it was about every 2 weeks cos I put it on all the time cos it was so nice.

LM: What about other smelly things and beauty products?

B: Yeah I do like always using deodorant but I'm not too worried about smelling bad. I don't think I'm really a smelly person but you just get into a routine and yeah

perfume. I wear as long as it's not too strong I go the sort of watery ones like Cool Water. Giles was laughing at me cos on holiday I had this Splash stuff, it was Johnson's Baby Splash but it is so nice. I put it on my face in the mornings. So I kind of put on my deodorant and then cleansing my face and then putting my moisturizer on and then putting this splash on and he was like what are you doing?

LM: It's then that you realize what you do everyday without thinking about it. Can you remember how you developed a routine?

B: Yeah I mean I have never been very very good on it. I've never been obsessed. I mean some people can't go to bed without taking their make up off I mean if I've had a heavy night I do. I just go to sleep in whatever. But when I was younger I was about 12 or 13, I started. I've never been very good with soap so I started using facial washes then. But I didn't use moisturizer until the age of about 16 cos I couldn't find one that didn't bring me out in spots.

LM: Really? Can you explain?

LM: Yeah so that is my real expense cos I have Clarins stuff for that and then Mum started buying these little eye gels and I think you just get into a routine of those eye gel things when you are a bit puffy in the mornings. So yeah it must have been about that time

LM: And at that time was your mum influential or friends? Or your sister?

B: I think, well never my sister. We are different, very different. Yeah I think mum was a bit. My other friend Suzy is a bit well, she has got potions and lotions and the lot and she went through a phase when she was single and she had a lot more time to do it. I think it is time. Cos when I was single recently I did I started to do a lot more things and I am thinking of the build up to Dublin. I was lying in the bath with a face pack on and I was exfoliating and God when was the last time I did this cos I don't normally do it. And I was saying to a friend that now I am with Giles I don't take as much care of myself anymore because you don't have a night where you can just lie in and paint your nails and do different things like that. And I suppose now I start to do it round there. So I say I'm going for a bath or whatever. But I was having so much time on my own I would fill it with that

LM: What about a make up routine or nails and stuff?

B: Well not much really no. I'm not very good on things like that. I mean my nails are ridiculous cos of netball and everything like that you can't really. I've never really been that particular on things like that. I mean when I go out I like my hair to look nice and I like my face to look nice. I mean the girls I was with this weekend have all had French manicures and different things like that but I have to paint my toenails cos they are black

LM: Yeah netball I know what you mean

B: Yeah netball and running. I mean I've got 2 really black toenails at them moment. So yeah so I have to do that but I'm not sort of obsessed in that way. I mean I slightly painted them for this weekend. Facially I suppose you have a routine but so long as it is natural. I mean I can't put foundation on my face

LM: So what would you do?

B: Um oh I don't know. Well sometimes I put, well round here (mouth and chin) I'm still so spotty. Mind you this weekend has been horrendous. After a weekend of drinking it all comes out. So I put like a cover up round here cos it is so scarred now. You can't really see it

LM: No you can't

B: No but and then sometimes I put on a tinted moisturizer if I am feeling pale but it is so light. And then some eyes, a little bit of eye make up and lipstick if I am pale

LM: Do you feel bad about the skin on your face?

B: Yeah I don't like it I hate having spots and I will cover them up but saying that I have made up my mind that I am going back home today and it's just got to breath so I am going to take everything off. Cos I think this week end it has had lots of make up on and I've been drinking and eating rich food and everything and also it's the week before your period and I feel so much more confident when I haven't got them cos you can be natural. That's why I love it when you are on holiday and your skin is clear and everyday you can go out without make up on your face. UI know A tan helps you with that cos you don't need it

LM: You feel like your skin is glowing?

B: That's it yeah

LM: What about health related things like taking vitamins?

B: Yeah I don't do anything like that. I used to when I was really skinny. When I went through that stage I took a lot but it ended up that I was taking so many tablets every day that I sort of stopped taking them and my calcium is probably very low cos the only dairy products I have well is lots of yogurts but I don't have cheese and the only time I have milk is tea and it could be low in that area and people have said that I should take this and that supplement and ant one stage I started taking iron cos my nails were really bad cos someone said iron was really good. But you get out of the habit

LM: I was just thinking back to what you were saying about nudity. Back to the shower issue and body confidence can you say anything more on that?

B: I don't have a problem really. Yes I can feel fat and unconfident sometimes. I think I was bought up with hockey and swimming and stuff and obviously I had to do it then so no I haven't (got a problem). I mean obviously I don't like parading around the changing rooms naked but I'm not, I mean I don't have to cover myself up. I can just have my knickers on and put cream on. Yeah I like to have my knickers on but I've never had problems with being topless but then I haven't got huge boobs.

LM: IS there something personal about having knickers on?

B: Yeah I think so. I don't know why. It's just personally me. Once I've got them on it's OK I don't mind but then it's just like going topless on holiday. But then I don't really parade around like that. I can lie there and be topless and I can just about get from the sun bed to the pool but I couldn't sit there talking to someone topless. Especially a bloke. I couldn't do it.

LM: What would you feel?

B: I'd just feel really paranoid. I'd have to put a top on I'd feel really uncomfortable

LM: What about other women in the changing rooms. Do you see people who are uncomfortable?

B: MM. Yeah it is normally the bigger ones. You actually watch cos I do sometimes watch them. And they are trying to after they have had a shower, and they either get changed in there or if not they have got to be completely covered and they work it out so they are completely covered and you'd never see them standing in their knickers and their bra. Never

LM: What do you think?

B: I feel how uncomfortable they must feel. And they obviously are paranoid about it you know and then I think well why do you let yourself get like that and I know that people have more natural body types but you can stop yourself being like that. And they have obviously let themselves and OK they are at the gym now. There was a girl at the gym the other day and she was huge and Nicky was doing a programme for her and I thought yeah good on her. cos she has come but I think that it must be so hard working from the bottom cos we go in there and we are starting from the top almost. And we know we can get on the treadmill and run for 5 miles and this girl was walking for 5 minutes. And I'm thinking how on earth are they going to lose it

LM: What about being naked when you are pregnant?

B: Oh I don't know. I think it depends how the rest of me went. You know cos some people do just have a bulge that is really small. But if I went really fat I don't think I would as much. But I was thinking about that cos I was thinking I want to keep everything going when I do get pregnant. And one of them they say is to do swimming but how would you actually feel cos you are completely undressed

LM: You said you look at people do you think that's common (do you think everyone looks at everyone else)?

B: I think women probably do. I mean some people might say I am more obsessed with weight and different things like that. But you do look and you see someone big and you do wonder what they look like. Even though sometimes you get really skinny, naturally skinny girls in there but then you do look at them. I went on a hen weekend and all of the girls were more naturally skinnier than me and up top they are really petite but all of them when we got into swimming costumes cos we went to a health club were all really pear shaped here and really quite flabby and I was like you know you can't, well they looked really slim and I know I am broader than them but I was happier in that my shape was better

LM: So it's not just about being thin and being a size 6 then?

B: Yeah, Mmmm. It's about tone

LM: Yeah we were out on Saturday night and one of the girls was tiny and I mean we are all quite imposing cos I am 5'10": Juliet is nearly 6' Gemma is 5'8 or so and we are big. And this girl is about 5'2". She is a tiny little thing. And she was talking about being unhappy with her weight and wanting to lose some and I was like but you are so tiny and she was like no look and she showed me her tummy and in terms of body fat it was probably bigger than all of ours although she was so so tiny. So for you would body fat be the biggest issue rather than weight?

B: Yeah I think so and where I have put it on recently is sort of round here round the middle region and I hate that. I mean Emma doesn't help cos she will walk up to me and other people and come and grab you (the fat bit). I know it's a joke but it doesn't help sometimes cos I know it is there. But it seems to have shifted a bit cos I'm no different weight

LM: Do you think that will happen ever? As you get older?

B: yeah but it normally goes here on your thighs. I've never really had it there before.

LM: Rob and I were talking and he was saying it always goes on his face

B: Me too

LM: And just thinking about what you said about make up earlier. Was it something that you started with girls at school or something you do with the girls now?

B: Mmm. Not really as much as you think. It depends which girls I'm with. If it's girly girls we do sit round and talk about nails and different things like make up. But none of my friends are really girly girls. I think the ones I've been with this weekend are more so. I mean when I was younger I was always sporty so those girls are into it. I do talk about hair to some people. Like Suzy my friend

LM: So you'd ask her opinion and what would work?

B: Yeah kind of but I mean really I've never been into all of that. So long as my hair suits me. I mean Suzy has always been desperate to take me shopping for make up and stuff and she is like right I'm going to get you in a different lipstick and not bothered. I mean it might be nice but I am generally happy with the way it is and if someone tries to change me I hate it. I'm not comfortable. Whereas she has got so much make up and yes she can make herself look stunning but as long as I feel confident that's enough

LM: Is that routine then something that makes you confident?

B: yeah I'm not good at change. I had a make over at a health club and it was awful. I thought yeah I'll try and see what someone else does with me and all the foundation I could just smell it. It was horrible and thick and a pinky lipstick. And pinky on my eyes and the one thing I have to do is curl my eyelashes cos I've got really heavy eyelids and long lashes and I just hate it, even for my sister's wedding mum wanted me to do make up doing cos my sister had it done and I said ok she can try but in the end I was happier doing it myself

LM: I was like that when I was a bridesmaid. I had just been on holiday and I said (to the lady doing my make-up for the wedding) I didn't want any foundation and she was ok with that. But still I was scared what she would do cos I don't want heavy eyeliner and eyebrow pencils. You look like a doll.

Beth looked at her watch and we terminated the interview until the next time.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE 002e – 'BETH'
1 JULY 1998

GENDER, BODIES, IDENTITIES IN THE FITNESS GYM

The line between informal conversation and more formal interview discussion was blurred throughout the research project. That is, topics that I informally discussed with my participants emerged during the taped interviews, and, in addition, we spoke about our interview discussions on several other, less formal occasions. Even after the defined period of research, these women still talked with me about many of the corporeal themes and issues discussed in the thesis. I was engaged in an informal discussion with Beth on one occasion when she began to talk about some recurring themes of the project. I had a tape recorder with me and we conducted this short interview towards the end of the research project. It served as one means of verifying some of the observation and previous interview material that I had collected throughout the research. In this interview, I asked her to reflect, once again, on issues of body image and working out at the fitness gym. Beth only had 30 minutes free for this (spontaneous) interview.

INTERVIEWER (LM): well we have been talking for two years now and you have seen some of the transcripts. You can have them all to read and have a look at what you said. But seeing as we are talking I just wanted to ask you to reflect on your experiences in the gym over the past two years. What it's been like? Do you feel the same about the training and your body as you always did?

PARTICIPANT (B): well I don't think I have changed an awful lot in any way. Although my weight has fluctuated, I have remained the same about it. It goes up and down. You are never happy with it up. And in terms of the ideal weights and body we talked about I guess when it goes up it's well. ...Anyway it's (my weight) gone down now and that's really my ideal. I don't know. I go through phases, crazes of thinking I have got to lose weight for one reason or another and I train hard and then it drops off a bit.

LM: so just tell me a bit more about what makes you intense about it

B: oh it's normally things like a holiday or if I am seeing someone I haven't seen for a long time or if it's I don't know a dinner or a ball or something. Or, if it's just the summer. I guess really I am always concerned aren't I. I need to have a goal. What I find is that I sort of diet and, well if I am honest I know I do crash train and crash diet and then the weight goes straight back. Like at, just before Christmas, I lost 5 pounds and then the trouble is because I have crash dieted, although I watched what I ate and didn't eat too much it's gone back on again. So it's like I do get depressed because you've got to start again you know?

LM: is it like a cycle?

B: oh yeah, Mmmm, exactly like that really

LM: how do you feel about that?

B: I do get depressed some times. I mean after Christmas, I got on the scales and I had put on that 4 or 5 pounds. And I was happy how I was (lighter) although people said I was looking a bit gaunt, I was happy. Things were feeling big with the extra (weight) and I like it when they don't do that. And I was like God I was hardly eating more than what everyone else was eating. And in the end I had a week off training because of the snow and the gym being shut and the timings. And I was like God I do get upset and depressed because to keep the shape I am and I like I have got to do it (work-out). And actually Charlie and I were talking about it and she is exactly the same.

LM: what do you mean in comparison to other people in terms of not eating and doing your training? Do you battle more?

B: Oh well that depends who you are comparing yourself to. I mean when I look at my sister and what she was eating over Christmas, well God she is about 16 stone. So there are people around me like members of staff at school and they are all bigger than me. And one of the girls I work with has lost a lot of weight recently and she still scoffs and I know I will never be like that, you know, really big. But to maintain the weight I want, I don't know, I think I am probably lower (weight) than my body wants me to be and so I am fighting it.

LM: so are you unrealistic about your body? Is your weight not a natural weight?

B: yeah probably but I know what I want to be. I mean I have been seven and a half stone and an absolute rake and that I would call unrealistic now. I know I could get down there if I literally just starved but I have realised that as I have got older I will always want to be like I am (now) but I think you accept (the limits.) I mean I look at myself about 4 or 5 years ago and my weight did go up a lot and I was a stone and a half heavier than I am now and I think (she looks horrified) how could I have let myself get like that. But I think it's a general feeling of allowing myself about half a stone fluctuation and you know you would never let yourself go any further.

LM: So at this moment in time what is your ideal weight and shape?

B: Um well I am about 9 stone 2 pounds now. I liked myself just before Christmas I was about 8 stone eleven, something like that. I like myself just under nine stone. I feel happier, you know. I feel like there is no extra flab anywhere. But I don't look gaunt, but I feel lean.

LM: yes, like you have always said

B: yes I wouldn't want to go any lower. I don't like having extra flesh. But I have noticed over past couple of years now it seems to have, well it never used to go on my stomach or round this area (points to waist). But I think that I train more now and I am more muscular, and more muscular arms it seems to go on my stomach. Like the old love handle thing. I hate that (she laughs). It doesn't go on my bottom or legs like some people.

LM: Do you think that's because you are getting older

B: Mmmm. Yes could be I suppose. I did start to think about that and thought God this is showing you that you are getting older. I don't want to get old (She sighs and moans). Oh God I don't want to get old an end up, you know sometimes you see older people who train and they just look awful.

LM: How do you mean?

B: Oh I don't know. If they are too lean and wrinkly, I don't know it doesn't look right. Because they are too skinny. I mean I look at my Mum and she is ideal. She used to be eight stone two and she is shorter than me. Now she is nine stone two and she looks good for it. She likes to be about 8 stone ten, but as she has got older, she looks better with a bit more weight whereas at eight stone two she would look gaunt.

LM: You said that your ideal weight could shift up. When would that be? Can you be comfortable / happy a bit heavier?

B: Um, well the time I put in quite a lot of weight I was settled with a new boyfriend but I didn't want him to think that I was so preoccupied with my weight. I was like come on if he wants to eat at lunchtime then I will do it for him. I mean sometimes I do think I have to be a bit happier with my (natural) weight. But then I get in the gym or train and look and think no I don't want to be bigger. And when my clothes start getting tight I know.

LM: Are you unhappy with your body then?

B: No, no not really. Sometimes I do get unhappy if I put on weight.

LM: you said depressed earlier. Is that what you meant?

B: Um, fed up I suppose. Low and fed up.

LM: Disappointed?

B: Yeah, yes. Disappointed in my self. I mean when I was almost anorexic, well really skinny anyway, I would be in tears because I had eaten and I felt really guilty. I mean I do feel guilty about eating some things. I don't eat a lot of chocolate for example and sweets. But there are times when you think ooh I really would like something or you know you have a chocolate or a biscuit or something and I do now think, well that's all right because I can sort that out by the gym, or training, and I allow myself things like that.

LM: That's quite interesting because lots of women I talk to have spoken about developing a more relaxed attitude to their bodies over time or depending on certain circumstances like being pregnant. Do you think you go through phases of intensity about your body do things change?

B: Yeah there must be because of what I have described about previously being really skinny and now being a bit bigger. But still there is that thing in you. You wouldn't let it all go. I mean I think about being pregnant, I would like to but it scares me, I fear putting on all that weight. But there must be a time when you have got to relax about it. But then I will always, and I hope I will always be concerned about how I look because if you relax too much and accept anything I wouldn't look right. My life is with goals (for my body). It always has been. That's me. It will always be. I have an acceptable weight but then I will have a goal for a holiday or what ever. Like I think

about getting married and I think ooh I still want to look nice for my wedding. I wouldn't ever want to balloon. So that's why I hope I will always be concerned about it.

LM: So are these concerns a part of you? Internalised?

B: I think a lot of it is. It is I. I mean it's like I have a problem with my doctor at the moment and I have changed doctors because I have had dizzy spells recently and collapsed. And ... well ...

She pauses here

LM: Can you explain a bit?

B: Well the last one was the Thursday after Christmas. Had we been for a drink? No we didn't get together. No anyway I was standing at the bar and I had one glass of white wine and I just went dizzy and I have had that before and felt queasy but everything went blurry and went hot and fell to my knees. Didn't pass out exactly. And I went so hot and couldn't really see. And my hearing went blurry. Everything was a blur. I was dripping with sweat and they couldn't lift me up for about two minutes. And they got me a glass of water and I just seemed to snap out of it. And I had been to the doctors about a month before. I have been dizzy in the treadmill and I put that down to not eating. But it had happened once when I was out and I just had a meal so I had tests for diabetes and thyroid and anaemia. But couldn't find anything. And it happened again and I was thinking brain tumour and everything (she laughs) but anyway, the only thing he came up with was my blood pressure was low. But the first time he met me he diagnosed irritable bowel syndrome but he said straight away that he said "I think you have bought this on yourself". And he didn't know me and he hadn't read my notes and he said you have irregular eating habits and he just blames me. And he is saying that my body is saying that it can't cope. So I do have breakfast now and make sure I eat four times a day and OK it might just be an apple or fruit or a carrot. But I do eat a bit more.

LM: Is he right?

B: I guess. Some people do say they don't know how I keep going with all the training and everything. I mean for years I have trained and trained and my body just keeps going.

LM: Don't you want to just let it go?

B: Yeah, it's a battle but it's me. It's been part of me for years. Sometimes I do think Uh, I don't want to go to the gym, I don't want to run, and I don't want to train. But on the other hand you want it to stay a part of you because it helps you look how you want to look and like we said that it part of you. It is you. Everyone has thing that are an effort in their life and that is my effort. I mean my family can be big. My sister eats a lot. When we were kids we were big children. I am not designed to be small. My Mum hardly eats anything. She has to really watch what she eats. We are not designed to be slim. We did so much sport when we were younger and we were solid then like I have said before. So it is a battle. Sometimes I do wish.. I could get rid of the stomach pain and hunger and (still look the same).

LM: OK well thanks for your time today I know you are rushed. I am sure we will talk more at another time.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEWEE PROFILE SUMMARY

001 Anna (aged 27)

Anna identified herself as British and white. Her religious affiliation was Roman Catholic. She listed her occupation as a sport and recreation officer, but during the research she changed jobs to work in health promotion for a local authority. She listed her marital status as single. Anna had no children. She had 1 sister and 1 brother and was born 3rd in the birth order. Her father was a meteorologist and her mother a receptionist / accounts clerk. She exercised at the gym every day and played a game of competitive netball once a week.

002 Beth (aged 23)

Beth identified herself as British and white. She affiliated to the Christian religion. She worked as a schoolteacher and her marital status was single. She did not have any children. Beth had 1 sister and was born 2nd in the birth order. Her father was an accountant and her mother was a schoolteacher. Beth exercised at least five times a week using a combination of cardiovascular and weight-training workouts in the gym, running, exercise classes and games of netball.

003 Charlie (aged 27)

Charlie identified herself as British and white. She listed the Church of England as her religious affiliation. She was training to be an osteopath, having just completed a sport and exercise science degree. Charlie had no children. She had 3 brothers and was 4th in the birth order. Her mother had recently died and she did not indicate whether she had worked. She noted that her father was retired but did not list his occupation. Charlie worked-out every day at the gym using a combination of running, cycling, dancing and resistance and free weights

004 Dina (aged 22)

Dina identified herself as English and white. She affiliated to the Christian religion. She was a doctoral candidate at the local university conducting physiological studies

of female athletes. Dina was single and did not have any children. She had 1 brother and was 2nd in the birth order. Her mother's occupation was listed as payroll officer. However, her father had not been involved with the family for some time and she did not list his occupation. Dina exercised everyday. She focused on exercise and fitness regimes that would develop strength, power and speed.

005 Eva (aged 39)

Eva identified herself as British and white. She listed her religious affiliation to the Church of England. She worked as a receptionist and sometimes a part-time cleaner. She also took an active but unpaid role in her husband's business. She was married with no children. Evan had 2 sisters and was 3rd in the birth order. Her mother was deceased and she did not list her occupation. Her father was a retired civil servant. Eva worked-out on most days of the week using a combination of power walking, horse riding, and cardiovascular exercises at the gym

006 Fiona (aged 27)

Fiona identified herself as British and white. She was a Christian. She worked as a deputy manager at the fitness centre. However, she was a talented singer and was part of a band. During the research she resigned her post at the fitness centre to concentrate on a singing career. Fiona was single with no children. She had 1 brother and was 1st in the birth order. Her mother was a nanny and her Dad a chief engineer on a commercial ferry. Fiona exercised 6 times per week. She concentrated on cardiovascular work in the gym, light weight training, and she played competitive football for a local club.

007 Grace (aged 22)

Grace identified herself as British and white. Her religion was listed as Church of England. She was an undergraduate student at the local university college, studying sport and exercise science. Grace was engaged to be married and had one child. During the course of the research she was pregnant and gave birth to her second child. Grace had 5 sisters and 2 brothers and was 6th in the birth order. Her mother was a project worker and she listed her father's occupation as businessman. She usually exercised 5-6 times a week and during the later stages of her pregnancy 3-4 times per week. She was involved in running, tennis, badminton, swimming and

horse riding. And at the gym she made use of both cardio vascular and weight training activities.

008 Helen (aged 30)

Helen identified herself as white and British. She listed her religion as Church of England. She worked as conference coordinator. Helen was single and had no children. She had just bought a house with her boyfriend. She had one sister and one brother and was 3rd in the birth order. Her mother was a school teacher and her father was an engineer. She said she exercised as much as possible and normally two or three times per week. She liked the exercise to music classes, especially the ones that were choreographed and dance focused. At the gym she used the treadmill and light free weights.

009 Ingrid (aged 40)

Ingrid listed her ethnic affiliation as white and her nationality as British. Her religious background was Christina. She worked as a research assistant for a cardiac unit at the local hospital. The emphasis on her work was cardiac rehabilitation and health promotion. As well as using the fitness gym, she was a member of a large corporate facility in a nearby town. Her parents were both retired teachers. She liked to be active on most days of the week. She walked a lot and when she was at the gym participated in exercise to music classes, yoga, cardiovascular work and light weights.

110 Jane (aged 23)

Jane identified herself as British and white. Her religious affiliation was with the Church of England. She worked as a sport and recreation manager at a further / higher education institution. She said that her mother was a housewife but worked as a part-time receptionist. Her father was a salesman. Jane had one child and she had recently become engaged to her boyfriend. After her first interview she became pregnant with her second child. She liked to take part in regular physical activity including waling and jogging. She worked-out at least twice a week on the treadmill and bicycles and used some of the free weights.

APPENDIX 3

GENDER, BODIES, IDENTITIES IN THE FITNESS GYM

OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES (14)

3 NOVEMBER 1998 (1.30 - 2.30)

I was so tired today. I really felt like I needed a work out to energise me but it took me a while to get going. In the end, my work-out was rather short and relaxed. I spent most of the session today just watching people and chatting. Actually it was quite relaxing and enjoyable to hang out and chat to people for a while. I started to think about the way people were working out.

Tim was at the end of his work out on the rower. He's always so happy. Always says hello and has time to talk. He always works out so hard as well. He is a big man, probably 18 stone but he seems really fit. He does at least 45 minutes of CV work whenever I see him. The effort he puts in is evident from his heavy breathing and sweating. He says he is not that fit and cannot run even though he would like to because he is too heavy. In fact he was funny about his weight today. He said he was on a 'seafood' diet. That is, he sees food and eats it. Actually that reminds me of Dina's comments about Tim's diet. She lives with him and said she was astounded at how much he eats. I asked him if he wanted to lose weight. He said "yes kind of", but that it did not bother him that much because he liked his food too much. He added that he didn't think it meant so much to men to be slim as it did to women. I asked him why and he replied that he thought that women were under more pressure to look a certain way to be attractive whereas, for men, different bodies were attractive. "What do you mean?" I said. He replied "well, I guess men can be all shapes and sizes, muscley, a bit portly, even a bit fat and it's acceptable". He laughed out loud as he normally does and moved off the rower onto the bike. I got on the stepper and watched for a little longer.

When I first came into the gym today, I noticed that all the people working out were guys. For about 20 minutes there were about 15 men in the gym and there was a very workmanlike atmosphere. They all worked out diligently with minimum fuss. There was still a friendly atmosphere, these men acknowledged each other with nods and smiles, and most of them were working out in pairs or groups. Two men were working out on CV equipment. One was Tim who was doing a long CV work-out. The other warmed up on the bike for 5 minutes before moving into the weights rooms. All the other men were working out with quite heavy weights. Their efforts were evidenced by clenched teeth, grunts, sweating and heavy breathing. They gave

quiet encouragement to each other and respectfully watched or helped each other's work out by spotting or counting sets. Their gestures of encouragement included nods, taps on the back, and subtle hand touches. There was a great deal of non verbal communication in the form of expressions like smiles, looks and nods. The differences and similarities between the ways that men and women work-out struck me today. After 20 minutes of this observation, several women came in to work out and I could observe their practices and techniques a little further.

There were some women today who, like the men, worked out really hard. Some of them get really sweaty, they breathe heavily, they run fast and lift weights. I watched Dina today. She is one of my interviewees. She was in the free weights room, a section of the gym where few other women seem to go. It's full of a range of weights that you can only really use if you know what you are doing. She had a big diary / notebook with her. Every time she finished a set of exercises she would check her notebook, write something down, read some notes she had made. I went into the free weights section to see what was in her book. She said "Hi" and I said "do you mind if I look at your notebook" (bit cheeky really, I don't know her that well and she was training on her own. Maybe she didn't want to be disturbed). She said "yes go ahead, it's a training diary". It was log-book with a list of every training session she did and details of what exercises she had completed and how she had felt when doing it. It was really detailed and included the exact weight she used for each exercise, the number of repetitions in each set and the number of sets. She also make notes about how it all felt. For example, today it said "feels good", "squats feel strong" and "could increase weight". I asked if she had planned all this or just came in and did what she felt like. She replied "oh it's all planned for months but I keep a record of how it is going to I can progress or know why things might not be going so well". She really takes it all very seriously, has specific aims for her work-outs and I guess for her body. In fact she has begun to talk about her body image and her work-out sessions in the interviews so I can compare what she does and what she says.

A group of about 4 girls came into the gym. They were talking a lot and giggling loudly. They seemed to be talking about their morning's work. They were vocal and expressive and seemed to know each other well. All 4 of them were wearing tight track pants with fairly baggy t shirts over the top. I thought they could best be described as slightly plump. Two of them got on the bikes and two of them used the treadmill to walk. They looked a little confused about using the equipment but helped each other to get started. They seemed to laugh a lot at their own lack of

knowledge and ability on the equipment. After about 5 minutes on their chosen equipment they stopped. One girl let out a huge sigh, "That will do she said and shrugged her shoulders". All four of them sat on the mats to do some stretching, still chatting away. The biggest of the girls pulled out an exercise programme card, read it, and they all moved to the chest press machine. One girl put the lowest weight on it and they took it in turns to do ten reps. They moved round together, giggling away and completed reps on the bicep curls, lat pull down and leg extension. They did another 5 minutes on the rowers and finished with a few sit ups on the mat. Then they left. They seemed to have a strong social agenda to their work out session. It was quite refreshing to see them enjoying themselves. But it reminded me of something one of my interviewees had said about those who don't train very hard. Charlie (003b) said that people who don't get all sweaty don't fit in as well at the gym. She said, they just "ponce about". Some of the established-outsider relations are emerging here.

I was just about to leave when Dave came in. I hadn't seen him for a while. He has just had knee surgery and was going through a process of rehabilitation. I was just finishing my walk and he came to talk to me. I think he wanted to really talk about his injury experience. He asked me about lots of the intimate details of the surgery. In fact I was surprised at some of the personal questions but I didn't mind answering them. Our conversation began by him saying:

D: How were you when you came round from the surgery?

L: OK a bit dazed. I can remember taking a few moments to orientate myself take some deep breaths and wiggle my toes. It's always really bright in recovery.

D: Yeah and the nurse is right there. Christ I was scared I didn't know where I was I screamed and they wacked the gas and air on and all I said was I want a Mars Bar.

L: I was a bit nervous about what my leg would be like because I was in full plaster.

D: Oh yeah. I was in pain as well and sick and ill. I didn't expect it. Did you go to the toilet straight away?

L: Oh God. The nurse had to put me on a bed pan and it was a male nurse.

D: Oh God yeah the nurse had to hold it for me and I was ill for ages.

L: I had a few queezy moments when I tried to stand and use my crutches and I was uncomfortable for ages and couldn't sleep with the plaster and it was excruciating when they took the blood drain out. The woman next to me was sick for 24 hours.

D: And how long before you could do stuff again? I mean I've been told I've been doing really well but the NHS have just left me now and I'm seeing Dave here who has been quite good.

I explained some of my rehabilitation and suggested some things he could do. My physio had been the physio for the British Lions. Dave explained his operation and it sounded the same as mine. We compared scars as well. I'm not bothered by mine. It is a big scar but very thin and faded. It's not noticeable to me. Dave said he was pleased with his too. He said "doesn't look bad eh?" I agreed. He was really fed up working out at the gym and wanted to play football once before Christmas. He said he might try some squash or badminton but the gym was now boring him and he vehemently said "especially *that* machine" pointing to the knee extension. "It makes me want to scream" he explained. "Why?" I said. And he replied because I do it over and over and over again and it hurts and doesn't get any easier. In fact he said that training could be like that sometimes and he shrugged his shoulders as he walked off to start his work-out saying "why are we doing it? I finished my walk, picked up a drink and went back to work to have a shower.

APPENDIX 4
INTERVIEWEE PROFILE FORM (001)

Name _____

Date of Birth _____ Age _____ Birth Place _____

Nationality _____ Ethnic Affiliation _____

Marital Status _____ Number of Children _____

Number of Sisters _____ Number of Brothers _____

Birth Order 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th other (please state) _____

Occupation _____

Occupation of Mother _____ Occupation of Father _____

Religious Affiliation _____

Membership of Gym / Health Club (please name) _____

Membership of other Sports / Exercise Clubs (please name) _____

Frequency of Exercise _____

Exercise Type _____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS FORM

APPENDIX 5
THE FITNESS GYM, WORKING OUT AND FEMALE BODIES
ETHICS AGREEMENT

Thanks so much for your willingness to participate in this research project. If you have any questions regarding the research you can contact me as follows:

Louise Mansfield, Room FG 33, Department of Sport Science, Canterbury Christ Church University College, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU.

Tel: 01227 767700 ext. 2678

email: lam1@canterbury.ac.uk

Your participation is very much appreciated. I would like to reassure you that as a voluntary participant in this project you have several very definite rights. You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time. In addition you are free to withdraw from any interview, or the project, at any time. I must emphasise that the information provided in the formal interviews and informal conversations will remain strictly confidential. Excerpts from the interviews may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Could you please sign this form to show that you have read and understood it, and return it to me in the SAE provided. Thank you.

NAME (please print) _____
SIGNED _____
ADDRESS _____ _____
CONTACT NUMBER _____